

SOCRATES IN CAMEROON



THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
BERNARD NSOKIKA FONLON
EDITED BY NALOVA LYONGA

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Bernard Nsokika Fonlon

Edited by

NALOVA LYONGA



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Mankon, Bamenda

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BERNARD NSOKIKA FONLON 1924-1986

EDUCATION

Early education

1931-39: Primary School 1942-45 Secondary School

1942-45: Secondary School: Christ the King College, Onitsha, Nigeria

1948-53: Philosophy and Theology Bigard Memorial Senior Seminary, Enugu, Nigeria

University Studies

1954-61: The National University of Ireland, Cork: Studied under Professor E. Byrne Costigan, Drs O'Flaherty, Servais, Forgatton

The Sorbonne, Paris: Studied under Professor Georges Balandier

Oxford University: Studied under Professor Halls

QUALIFICATIONS

1939: Primary School Leaving Certificate 1945 Senior Cambridge Grade One

1946: The Nigerian Teacher's Higher Elementary Certificate

1957: B.A. Honours, NUI Cork (2.1, Latin and French)

1959: M.A., NUI Cork (First, Thesis: *Flaubert Ecrivain, a study of Flaubert's style*, written in French)

1960: Diploma in Education, Oxford University

1961: Ph.D., NUI Cork (Thesis: *La Poesie et le Reveil de l'Homme Noir*, an investigation into Negro African protest literature in English and in French (including North America, the Caribbean, Africa and Madagascar). This was the first Ph.D. thesis in this field and was written in French under the auspices of Professor W. McCausland Stewart (Bristol), D Green (Oxford) and Professor E. Byrne Costigan (NUI Cork). This Ph.D was the first doctorate awarded to a Cameroonian.

1986: D.Litt. (*honoris causa*), University of Guelph Canada

TEACHING CAREER

1940-41: Pupil teacher, Kumbo. Four of his pupils became prominent scholars Paul Verdzekov, S.T.L., Ph.D., D.D. (Gregorian University, Rome), Archbishop of Bamenda Christian Tumi, S.T.L., Ph.D. (Fribourg University, Switzerland), Clement Nze, Ph.D. (University of Munster, West Germany), Omar Sendze, M.Sc. (London University), Chartered Engineer,

1946-47: St Joseph's College, Sasse. His former students include numerous B.A.s and M.A.s, one ambassador and several diplomats and senior civil servants.

1954: Christ the King College, Onitsha, Nigeria.

1960: Chippenham Grammar School, Wiltshire, England

1971: Associate Professor in the University of Yaounde

POSTS HELD

1961: Assistant Secretary to the Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons

1961-64: Charge de Mission (Presidential Aide) at the Presidency, Yaounde, Cameroon

1964-68: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Minister

1968-70: Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications

1970-71: Minister of Public Health and social Welfare

1962- Founder and Director of *Abbia, the* bilingual Cameroon Cultural Review

HONOURS

Academic

Nigeria: Patron of the Philosophical Fraternity of the University of Nigeria

USA: Member of the National Geographic society

USSR: Awarded the Pushkin Medal in Moscow on the 170th anniversary of the birth of the celebrated Russo-African writer

Political

Canada: The Canadian Medal

Vatican: A Papal Medal

The Medal of the Concilium Oecumencium Vatican
1 and 2

France: The Medal Trois Siecles de cartographie Francais

USA: Medal of the African-american dialogues

OAU: Medal Issued to the participants of the First Congress
of the OAU, 1963

Cameroon: Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Valeur, Officier de
l'Ordre de la Valeur

West Germany: Grosses Verdienstkreuz, Das Grosses
Verdienstkreuz mit Stern und Schulterband

Tunisia: The Order of the Tunisian Star

Nigeria: The C.O.N. for Distinguished Public Service

India: The Jawaharlal Nehru Medal

Africa: Medale de Vermeil d'Union Africaine et Malgache
des Postes et Telecommunications

Nso: Chieftaincy title, Shufai-wu-Ntu-Ndzev, conferred by
the Fon of Nso

PUBLICATIONS

Cultural and Philosophical

Inaugural article, (Abbia 1): lays down principles of the roles

of intellectuals and the authorities in cultural development; published in English and French.

African Writers Meet in Uganda (Abbia 1): lays down the canons of genuine African Literature; in English, French and German.

The Africanist Gathering in Ghana (Abbia 2): sets down the hallmarks of genuine African Studies; in English and French.

The Fear of Future Years, a poem (*Abbia 2*).

Nightmare, a poem (*Abbia 3*).

A Case for Early Bilingualism (Abbia 4, English; Abbia 7, French): an examination of bilingual education and a blueprint for its implementation in Cameroon. This work aroused immense interest in Canada and Switzerland, and was responsible for Dr Fonlon's invitations to give lectures in many centres in both countries. It was later adopted as the policy for the United Nations School in New York.

This work also resulted in a visit being paid to Dr Fonlon by Pierre Trudeau, and three Canadian television programmes were made.

During his Canadian lecture tour, Dr Fonlon appeared before the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, explaining his views and discussing their applicability in the Canadian context.

As a direct result of this contact with Canada, the Canadian Government gave a grant for the building of a waterworks system in Dr Fonlon's town, Kumbo. The system was inaugurated in 1974, at which time Dr Fonlon was awarded a chieftaincy title which means in translation "Chief of the

Source of the Water”.

In recognition of the value of his writings on bilingualism, Dr Fonlon was made a member of the Executive Council for the International Baccalaureate.

Will We Make or Mar? (*Abbia* 5): English and French.

Idea of Culture: (*Abbia* 11) English and French

(*Abbia* 16) English; examines the philosophical meaning and content of culture.

Idea of Cultural Integration (*Abbia* 19).

The Language Problem in Cameroon Comparative Education, Oxford: Pergamon Press; and New York: Ford Foundation (*Abbia* 23).

To Every African Freshman or The Nature of University Studies (*Abbia* 23, 24, 26); Victoria: Cameroon Times Press, 1971.

From Booker Washington to Dr Du Bois Melanges Africains, Yaounde University, 1972.

As I See It Buea: The Catholic Press, 1971: a treatise on the role of religion in individual and social life. It also contains a long poem, *In Memoriam*.

An Open Letter to the Bishops of Buea and Bamenda Buea: Catholic Press, 1973: a booklet which aroused widespread enthusiasm.

Random Leaves From My Diary Buea: Catholic Press, 1976: It is a series of philosophical reflections.

Political and Philosophical

To Every Son of Nso Yaounde: Unesco Press, 1965.

Under the Sign of the Rising Moon Victoria: Cameroon Times Press, 1965.

The Task of Today Victoria: Cameroon Times, 1966: a defence of Democratic Socialism.

Le Devoir d' Aujourd' hui: a political ideology for Africa. Other publications include articles and poems in *Abbia*. At the time of his death, Dr Fonlon had just completed his autobiography, *The Pathfinder*. Where there is any discrepancy between the information above and that given in *The Pathfinder*, the latter is clearly authoritative.

Mary Penrith, M.A., Ph.D., M.Litt.

Acknowledgement

When I conceived the book project in honour of Bernard Fonlon, I thought of an interview which Professor Richard Bjornson had conducted with Professor Fonlon. It occurred to me that “Socrates in Cameroon” should be the title not only of an interview but also of a book that would demonstrate in some small measure Dr Fonlon’s great wisdom. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Professor Bjornson for his insight.

It would have taken a long time for this book to appear were it not for the commitment of one of Dr Fonlon’s most devoted friends, Professor Loreto Todd of the University of Leeds. I am indebted to Professor Todd for undertaking all printing arrangements and ensuring that a fitting volume be published in memory of our honoured friend. I am grateful to all the contributors, and also to those whose tributes sadly could not be included for logistical reasons. They include: Siga Asanga, Jean Paul Ayina, Nouck Thomas Bibum, Elizabeth Cockburn (University of Guelph), Nsaikimo Killian Fai, Fai Henry Fonye, Myles R.R. Frechette (US Ambassador to Cameroon), Victor Anomah Ngu, Mabel M. Smythe-Haith (US Ambassador to Cameroon, 1977-80), Godfrey B. Tangwa, Isaac Celestin Tcheho and Barrie R. Walkley (US Cultural Attache, 1982-86).

I hereby acknowledge the support of my University, which has funded the book exclusively. I wish to thank the current Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Professor Jean-Louis Ndongmo, for his enthusiastic support in encouraging funding of the project. I salute the current Vice-Chancellor, Professor Jacob Lifange Ngu, Chairman of Yaounde University’s Book Publications Committee, for his commitment to its publication.

Introduction: Bernard Fonlon's Legacy

Bernard Fonlon rose from humble origins to become one of Cameroon's most famous sons. He was a scholar, a poet, a politician, a philosopher, a man of action and a man of courage. He was never too busy to see someone who was troubled, never too tired to take up the case of the oppressed or the downtrodden. He was a man who could communicate, with style, in half a dozen world languages but who could also use Pidgin English if it meant putting his listeners at ease. He was a man who moved in opulent circles but who collected for himself not money but the hearts of those who got to know him. It is easy to use superlatives of someone like Bernard Fonlon, easy to make him sound like a sage or a saint; it is less easy to describe the humour and the courtesy and the gentleness that irradiated all that he said and did.

Our initial purpose in writing this introduction was to describe briefly the life and times of a man whose story incorporates the history of a young nation and whose autobiography, *The Pathfinder*, has all the excitement of an adventure novel. We could use a lot of words and still not get to the heart of the matter because ordinary words are for ordinary men and Bernard Fonlon was unique. He was fond of quoting a Latin tag, *Verbum sat sapienti est*, meaning that to the wise, a word is sufficient, and it is perhaps fitting that we should take our cue from this. To those who knew him, no introduction is necessary; to those who did not know him, no short introduction is enough.

Bernard Fonlon did not leave a worldly legacy to his family and friends and country. He left much more. He left ideas that can never be buried and ideals that will challenge new generations. He was, as we have said, unique, but at the same time, he is in a line of people who gave their lives to serve their people. He lived in happier times than the freedom

fighter and ex-slave, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who died in a Paris jail in 1803. L'Ouverture inspired both Blacks and Whites and was commemorated in a sonnet by Wordsworth. The last lines of the poem could have been written for Bernard Fonlon:

*Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.*

Nalova Lyonga
Yaounde, 1989.

The Formative Years of Dr Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, 1924 to 1961

Daniel Noni Lantum

Dr Bernard N. Fonlon trod this earth for 62 years, that is, from 24 November, 1924, to 26 August, 1986. From the time he took over the role of interpreter at the historic Fouban Constitutional Conference in July, 1961, he became a Cameroonian public figure. However, the years between 1924 and 1961, the period of his youth and maturity, during which he was being prepared or trained for his future mission, are, as would be expected, less well known to the public and even to most of his close relatives. While they led an ordinary village life, the Spirit led their kinsman to strange frontiers, moulding him into an iron-willed man destined to make an impact on the moral, cultural, academic and political life of the young Cameroon nation, which seemed to have awaited his arrival before its birth in 1961. It is this early period that I will attempt to treat here, from rust-hand knowledge of Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, who was not only my townsman but my very close and special friend. This claim to a special relationship can be supported by the careful choice of words he used in his letters to me, terms which ranged from “your devoted friend” (1951) to “your affectionate Brother, Ben” (1955). And so we lived in friendship till I followed him on his last journey, behind the Kumbo Cathedral, where he was laid to rest as a priest, on Sunday, 1 September, 1986, near Rev. Father Aloysius Balon Wankuy and Father Jacob.

Even with this intimacy, I cannot claim that I knew the man completely. The present account is at best a rough summary of my impressions of him, as well as some events that we lived through together. If my story of the epoch

serves as a dependable outline of the personality of Bernard N sokika Fonlon, the details could be supplied by friends, members of the “inner circle”, as he sometimes called us, and by close relatives who lived with him. The special friends include Paul Verdzekov (Archbishop of Bamenda), Omar Birshu Banye Sendze and Bridget Biybe, now Mrs B.B. Wirnkar. Furthermore, it is quite possible that in *The Pathfinder*, his memoirs, which the Lord permitted him to compile and edit with his traditional rigour but never allowed him to see in print, Dr Fonlon may have written in greater detail. If this version differs from his in any point of fact, *The Pathfinder* should be taken as authoritative.

As for me, Ben was nine years my senior and so was my mentor as well as my friend. By 1950, the academic gap between him and me was so tremendous that I saw him as a special person, a luminary, a pace-setter, a specially blessed and gifted person, a highly educated person, a philosopher - in short, a senior brother with so many virtues and attributes that before him I felt like a dwarf. Hence he not only attracted my deep respect and admiration but won my friendship (“brotherhood” would be a more appropriate term) and thus became an object of my profound love and emulation.

1 Background Papa Joseph Fonlon was born in the mountain village of Banten, where the clouds never let the Kumbo people see the hilltops. He had brothers, including Baba Kong of Nkambe and Baba Kong of Djottin, father of Bernard Ngoran.¹ Pa Fonlon’s father was Shwaaïy and his mother was Binyuy of Mbiim compound in Meluv village. From his birth, Papa Fonlon inherited the social rights and privileges of the Nchelavsi social group in Nso polity. These are sometimes called “retainers” or the Fon’s servants. So Dr

Bernard Fonlon was of the Nchelav by inheritance from his father's line. History has it that before his father's conversion, he took part in the pagan raids which resisted the installation of the Catholic religion in N so land between 1913 and 1918.

From the mother's line, the story is told that the lineage head of Jem (in Kumbo town) had given a daughter in marriage to Boh compound in the village of Dzeng. There, she who was later to be known as Yesum Kibver-wo-Jem,² married a great warrior and hunter called N gwang N gaafin. Boh people are related to Kitukela Dzeng and Ntenyuy lineages. Of this marriage Naa (Dr Fonlon's mother) was born. Fortunately or unfortunately for Naa, her brother William of Jakiri and her sister Regina, who is Singeh's mother, they were not well looked after, and so they decided to return to Jem, their mother's home. For some strange reason, the Fon of N so seized them and entrusted them to the care of Shey Dzeni of Taba, where they were well received. An enduring quarrel arose between the Jem lineage head and the Fon on this account. While at Kumbo, Naa was caught up in the surging movement called "Christianity" and after due instruction she was baptised Agatha. The Boh people were so angry at her conversion that they disowned her and "burnt her bag" (a symbol of ostracism in N so culture). She resisted and kept her faith in Christianity, and so became an outcast to her Jem and Dzeng families, who could no longer control her and give her out in marriage according to custom. Thus liberated and assimilated into the Christian movement, she could, as was the practice, select a man of her choice within the Christian community. After an unsuccessful attempt with Mr Marcus of Ndzendzev - a relationship which brought forth her first daughter (now Mama Elizabeth Feter) Agatha married Mr Joseph Fonlon, probably in 1923.

By November 1924, a son was born to them and was

named N sokika, becoming Bernard N sokika after his baptism in his parents' religion. That is how N sokika became a Catholic. It was much later, in 1941-42, when Bernard N sokika, as he was commonly known in Nso society, enrolled in Christ the King's College, Onitsha, that he was asked to answer to his father's family name. And he became Bernard N sokika Fonlon, much later to be called, for short, Dr Fonlon. He had four other sisters: Agatha Ngwveh Kemjeei, Susanna Kongla (Mrs Ndzelen), Emerentia Fonlon and Mary Leeiyen (Mrs Fanka).

2 Early Years For his primary school, Bernard Nsokika attended the Native Administration! Authority (N .A.) school at Taa Bamfen. Kumbo, for one year and then in 1932 transferred to the Sacred Heart School, Shisong, about three kilometres from his mother's compound in Kumbo town. From the early years he proved to be a brilliant pupil, so that when he completed Standard IV, the highest class then available in Shisong, he was one of the few to go to St Anthony's School, Njinikom, where he completed Standards V and VI by 1940.

By then he was 16 years old, a handsome son of Mama Agatha Naa, who was then one of the older members of the Christian Women's Society called "Chong", which met every Sunday in the mission compound at Mbivtinmbang to socialize, eat, drink their *nkeang* (corn-brewed drink), dance and strengthen their solidarity and Christian moral force. Other influential women of this society were: Maria Bongayi (wife of Paul Tangwa), Rosina Kibong, Theresia Yikum of Dzeng, Monica Bati, Anna Langoiy, Maria Wirkpu and Angela Wirnsungrin.

At Njinikom, Bernard Nsokika came under the influence of the Reverend Father Thomas Burke Kennedy, a proud

Irishman who even brought out a personal car (was it a Morris Minor?) when other missionaries walked. Dr Fonlon reported with affection that Fr Burke's moral impact on him as his spiritual father (chaplain) was such that Dr Fonlon loved him till the end of his days. Till 1986 he even posted on his wall a newspaper cutting carrying Fr Burke's photograph and announcing his death. Fr Burke found Nsokika to be intelligent, bright, honest and pious, and he advised him to aspire to the priesthood - a special privilege, because it was then seen to be exclusively a white missionary profession. It required more than average intelligence, hard work, obedience, a prayerful spirit, and willingness to sacrifice wealth and marriage to serve the Lord all through one's life. Bernard Fonlon adapted his youthful life to denying much of the world and to trying to grow up according to the severe discipline of the priestly calling.

On leaving Njinikom in 1939-40, he returned to Kumbo already different - a potential seminarian. He was recruited by the Catholic Mission to teach in his Alma Mater, the Sacred Heart School at Shisong. There he taught Paul Verdzekov (now Archbishop of Bamenda), who remained a life-long friend. For his priestly drill he was assigned to catechise twice weekly at Kikai-kelaki, about eight kilometres from Shisong. There he taught young Christian Wiyghan Tumi, who is now the Archbishop of Garoua. He made the catechetical trips on foot and in the cold - a necessary toughening-up in the missionary spirit of self-sacrifice to preach the Good News. As well as this vocation, Bernard Fonlon loved music, and he always carried a flute which he blew at will on his way to school. In later years, I recall very well that he even acquired a mouth organ which he very much enjoyed.

Because of his love of music, Teacher N sokika joined the Shisong School Band. I recollect vividly going down to the

Ntoh-Nso (palace) in 1940 to watch the band leading the school to pay homage to the Fon of Nso, Ngah Bifon II, on Empire Day. I was then seven years old. There was teacher Vincent Lainjo marching in front with his curved stick, and there was Bernard N sokika in the ranks smiling and blowing his flute. The band was a beautiful glittering brass band with a bass drum, two side-drums, cymbals, triangles, 24 flutes, four bugles and four trombones, with smart band-boys marching in four rows to exciting music and wearing blue berets and red double sashes across their chests. It was said to be the special gift of Father Thomas Burke Kennedy, who had also been transferred to the Sacred Heart School. Thus Ben and his Irish mentor were again together!

By 1941, Bernard Fonlon, with Maurice Mbu Bayena, had left for Christ the King's College (CKC), Onitsha. Both combined their minor seminary studies and priestly training with their general education. Dr Fonlon often gleefully recounted their long trek through the countryside of the savage tribes of Ogoja land as an example of triumph in a dangerous adventure. Their vocation and departure were widely known in the Christian community they were the people's hope. From 1941 to 1946 Bernard Fonlon quietly pursued his secondary education in Nigeria, which to ordinary N so folk was tantamount to being abroad. In 1946 he visited home briefly after leaving CKC with his Senior Cambridge in Grade I and Exemption from London Matriculation. His brief visit was like the passage of an angel. Christians were proud of him.

At that time I was in Standard III, quite bright and alert. Bernard then went down to St Joseph's College, Sasse, to teach, and then met Mr. Victor Anomah Ngu. They became good friends, and this friendship grew and blossomed until Bernard died in 1986. Each time Bernard came on holidays,

he spent a lot of time visiting Christian parents, especially the mothers who were friends of his mother. In Nso land, where fathers are usually away from home children grow up mostly in the company of their mothers. My mother was one of those regularly visited. Apart from being very active members in the Christian Women's Society and thereby knowing one another, my mother Catharine Yuwun and Agatha Naa both hailed from Dzeng village and recognized some kinship.

In 1947, Bishop Peter Rogan, the Vicar Apostolic of Buca, permitted Bernard Fonlon to leave Sasse College and to join Aloysius B. Wankuy in the Major Seminary at Okpuala Owerinta, Nigeria. He was in Okpuala for barely one year before the Major Seminary was transferred to the new centre at the Bigard Memorial Major Seminary, Enugu. There he continued his studies in Philosophy till 1950, when he came home on holiday. His success was evident in his confidence and determination to continue, and he was a great inspiration to many of us.

The arrival of this son of Agatha Naa and Papa Joseph Fonlon was news in Kumbo town. If you wanted to see him, you had to attend morning Mass. During that holiday, we became firm friends, indeed brothers, never to separate. He was 26 years old, a philosopher and Seminarian, while I was just turning 17, a bright second-year student at St Joseph's College, Sasse, a College Scholar with strong attachments to the Church. In my absence, Anthony Mapry, my friend and College mate in Sasse and a minor seminarian, would serve Bernard, cleaning his rooms and fetching food and water. Before long, I was familiar with Bernard's simple and humble life style. Every night we had to read a chapter or two of the New Testament. Our conversation ranged from the everyday events of Kumbo town to school subjects such as geography and history; and we sometimes discussed the lives of the

Saints, particularly the Doctors of the Church, St Augustine, St Thomas Aquinas, St Albertus Magnus and St Bonaventure. He told us about the Greek philosophers, Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. Living, moving and chatting with Bernard was like attending a roving university.

When the holiday was half-spent, Bernard suggested that Mapry and I should spend the rest of it on a long journey that would take us to French Cameroon. We agreed with glee, particularly as he was to foot the bills. Our parents also agreed, so we prepared our luggage for the journey. We were told that at journey's end we would not return to N so, but continue straight to Sasse College, while Bernard would go on to Enugu via Mamfe.

The day of the journey finally arrived and we set out together in a lorry to Bamenda. Next day we started out early and reached Mamfe late at night. There we lodged with Mr and Mrs J .B. Chilla, N so people and Bernard's good friends, for two days. Bernard was very watchful over us and always made sure that we had had enough to eat. Seeing that our baggage was giving way due to rough handling and the shaking of the lorry on rough roads, he admonished us as would-be travellers. He said, "When travelling, always buy a good rope and tie your things properly. If you economise and save on the rope, you may lose all your baggage and whatever little wealth there is in it. Always keep a spare rope when you go on long journeys."

I listened with keen attention and obeyed him, but my friend Mapry did not take heed. On the morrow, as we were hurrying to catch a vehicle bound for Kumba, Mapry's luggage burst open and his small amount of garri poured onto the sandy road. The thin ties which he had mended and tied his box with had given way.] ran to the front of the vehicle and reported that Mapry was having a problem with his

luggage and pleaded with the driver to stop jus for a few minutes. Bernard, who was sitting in the front seat, carrx down, walked to the rear of the lorry and saw Mary struggling to tie things together.

For once Nsokika's temper was stretched to the limit and he los it. He severely chided us, "You headstrong fellows! You won' learn anything. How often do I tell you to do something and yo do the very opposite! Why do you sometimes behave like mules With this kind of behaviour we may as well call off our journey from the outset! French Cameroon is rather a risky place, and you can't get away with this kind of stubbornness. I may reconsider and do the journey alone, and leave you dead weights at Kumba."

This was bad, and our kind master had been badly wronged! He had been proved right beyond all doubt. Mapry had saved three pence through economy or stinginess (or disobedience) and paid for it with the loss of his precious garri and beans in the Mamfe sands, besides courting his kind master's anger and rage, the resultant show-down and his own depression. I joined in to help him put things together, but took the opportunity to chide him too, as I might lose the expected exciting journey. At last we managed to get on the hooting vehicle again, having lost the safety and peace of the more comfortable inner seats and now being forced to share the last boot rank with the wedge-heaver. In such discomfort we travelled the 120 miles to Kumba speechless, though my heart kept pleading that the kind master should rediscover his lost goodness, forgive us once again, and take us along with him to French Cameroon, particularly to Douala city, whose electric lights we had been viewing periodically from the Buea mountain slopes and Mutengene hills on clear, starry nights.

At Kumba, we lodged at the police station with the Yubins. Next morning, we got up still panicky and set out to

get new strings or ropes to bind our fragile boxes. Bernard saw the renewed effort, forgave us, and procured the required *Laissez-passer* for us all to continue together. It was great joy, as we drove in a Kitcar past Mukonje-Laduma German plantation settlement and reached the River Mungo - the famous frontier river. Bernard cautioned us to take courage and cross in the pontoon without trepidation, for the hungry hippopotamus and man-eating fish would not spare any human flesh found in that dangerous river. And so we were emboldened to try, and we were soon across.

The French customs were ready on the other side to search our thin luggage down to the last dirty sock, and to verify the validity of our *Laissez-passer*. This first assault over, we climbed slowly towards the Gare Mundeck. Fortunately, as we approached the station, the Nkongsamba - Douala passenger train could be heard puff-puffing in the distance; then the bells sounded and shrieking brakes were heard grinding on, and all passengers ahead of us began to scamper to find a place in any wagon as soon as it came to a stop. We followed suit, but following in the steps of our master. Soon we were in a Second Class compartment. Fierce-looking khaki-wearing men were soon round to check our tickets. We were now on our way to Douala, and Bernard told us a bit about the important stations we came across, such as Mbanga and Souza.

At Bonaberi we were well received by the Nso community, and everyone sought to have us lodged in their house. Bernard decided that we should stay with elderly Mama Philomena, who had plenty of spare space, and there we took the opportunity of being initiated into the French language, thanks to the co-operation of young Henri, who was attending primary school and often did his homework, "dessin et calcul", at home. We helped him to do his

arithmetic as well as teach him English, and he in turn taught us how to count in French and some French expressions of common usage. Occasionally we visited the Felix Miwayo (the famous tailor) family. At the first weekend, Papa Jacob Linjo, President of the Banana Association of Loum Paris, came down in a goods train with loads of bananas for shipment from the Bonaberi wharf. He was one of the elderly Nso men who had emigrated in the 20s and 30s, had settled down in French Cameroon and frenchified himself. He was happy to meet us at the Miwayo's (Mrs Miwayo-Domtila was his first daughter). It was a big feast with *Menjunga* (red wine) flowing in abundance.

Having ensured that we were well settled, the thoughtful Nsokika took leave of us and travelled alone in a risky engine-boat up to Yabassi, where he spent a few days with his old friend Abbe Maurice Foungang. After Dr Fonlon's death in 1986, I discovered old photographs of Father Maurice in a carefully labelled envelope in the files. He too had died, I gather, in the Parish of New Bell (Douala) some years ago. Nsokika's friends were friends forever. When he finally returned from Yabassi, he took us to see the Seat of Government in the *Quartier Bonanjo* of Douala city. And there we saw the *Palais de Justice*, the statue of General Le Clerc and the 1939-45 World War II monuments, the giant Post Office and the *Commissariat Central*. From there we visited the Akwa Cathedral and drove to see Lagos market. We visited the *Quartier Congo* where dwelt the Nso community, consisting of Mr Boniface Fonkika, a Nso prince who was a professional blacksmith, Papa Philip Vidjim, the famous Djottin drummer and expert Mbaya dancer, Papa Leonard Veye of Mbingiy, and Mama Yekwa, my relative from my mother's line, indeed her second cousin. Sylvester Kongnyuy and Cornelius Mantanin, our former primary schoolmates, had also recently

settled here and were working at the Douala Quays. A memorable and happy reception was mounted for Nsokika and our humble selves. In the evening we returned to Bonaberi, crossed on a launch jammed with passengers. We had seen Douala; the wise N sokika had been kind enough to show us new lands and experiences and peoples. As he had always said, "We learn more from travel than by reading books." We endorsed his wise saying.

The day of the beginning of our return journey was on the morrow. We packed our paper boxes well, and secured them with new ropes. We said *au revoir* to all our newly acquired friends during the evening, as we had to leave early. Next morning we passed through a *Librairie et Papeterie* and Bernard spent some minutes looking for the Beginner's French Grammar Book, by Dundo. As the stock was exhausted, he left some money there and requested the bookseller to order two copies from France and mail them direct to him at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu. At that time we were told that one French Equatorial African franc was equivalent to two French francs. Bernard told us that he was determined to learn French on his own and that he would start as soon as the books arrived. He proposed to do that during his spare moments at the Seminary. The books eventually reached him and he did put them to good use, I was told years afterwards. This was an initiative which, as history later proved, made Nsokika a bridge-builder between two leaders, Mr John Ngu Foncha and Al Hadji Ahmadou Ahidjo, and two states, the English-speaking Southern Cameroons and the French-speaking Republic of Cameroun. In other words, this was the beginning of the construction of the vital channel for the Cameroon Reunification process: from 1961 to 1964 Bernard Fonlon was the direct medium of communication between President Ahidjo and the rest of the

English-speaking world.

Between 1951 and 1954 we corresponded often. Then a great and surprising event took place. My friend Bernard Fonlon was sent away from the Major Seminary. This was to me incredible. At one moment the scene of our visit to Simon Fuhnjem at Penja, during our holiday journey, came to mind, and I recalled the words of Bernard Fonlon himself: "The priestly vocation is a very risky affair. Many are called, but few are chosen."

It turned out that Bernard Fonlon's apparently shocking send-down from the Seminary was perhaps more profoundly inspired by the deep wish and hope of the Seminary professors that the talent exhibited by this young man stood to serve the Church better from the lay Christian world than from the constrictions of the pulpit and altar. Bernard was not being excommunicated: the Church was rather enriching the lay front of evangelization by the service of a man of sound Christian philosophy and theology, for they knew that he was well trained and ever a priest at heart without the priestly robes. Indeed, he was so acclaimed posthumously and given the burial of a priest, thanks to the pronouncement of the Bishop of Kumbo, Dr Cornelius Fontem Esua.

Bernard Fonlon accepted the new role that he had been destined to play in his society. He left it all in the hands of God. While at Onitsha, on Monday, 6 September, 1954, he wrote in his diary:

When I look at my life, at the course it has taken, at the shaping it has received, I feel ... that, perhaps, I am headed for a share in the leadership of my people...

These, therefore, are the hallmarks of leadership that I must bear, should that role fall to my lot, namely - Comprehensive Learning, Death to the World, Moral Energy, Love of my People, Economic

Independence, Assiduous Industry, Concord with Co-Workers, Union with God. (Cameroon Panorama, 190, October 1977, pp. 22-23.)

3 Dr Bernard Goes to Europe for Further Studies As the Lord would have it, the former rector at the Minor Seminary in Christ the King's College offered Bernard a Scholarship to study classics at Cork University, Ireland, on the condition that, on the completion of his studies, he would return to teach at CKC for at least three years. Whatever the terms, it was for Dr Fonlon a welcome opportunity to pursue further studies, something for which he thirsted to the marrow of his bones.

By January, 1955, he was in Cork. In a letter to me he wrote:

That I am in a University today is one of the most wonderful things of my life: to me it teaches one lesson that has been deep nto the substance of my soul: That God never let down those who put their trust in Him.
(30 January)

On 2 October of that year, Ben wrote again, this time from London, to congratulate me for success at the Ibadan Entrance Examination, in which he had encouraged me; and also to tell me that he had spent a good holiday attending a Summer University Course in France: "It was a most exciting experience; of course, everything was done in French. Next I came to England, and spent seven weeks working on the Isle of Wight to earn my keep. Finally, I came to London where I have been spending a very happy time with Layu and others." He continued:

Well Dan, this is a time for rejoicing so I will leave off preaching for next time. Yet son, there are just two things I'll want you to bear in mind right from the start. No.1: Take your studies as it were by storm;

I have learnt from very personal experience that when you study like mad at the beginning of a course, the later work is made easier: try it and tell me a year or two after. No.2:

In this hour of victory remember that humility is the only attitude that shall bring greater victories; don't give it any chance to go to your head, and remember that this is not the end but the beginning of the end.

From this date, Ben laid off correspondence for some time. In 1957 a Mr Bassey, a contemporary of Bernard Fonlon at Cork, visited Ibadan University and I happened to meet him by chance at a party. Hearing that I was a Cameroonian, he began to speak about a Bernard Fonlon who had made the Black race at Cork exceedingly proud and happy by his good academic performance. He said that Bernard was so good that he baffled all his teachers, and that at the B.A. Honours examination they were forced to award him the degree in the Upper Division of the Second Class, which is scarcely awarded even to their own brilliant sons.

Bernard's professors were so pleased with him that they invited him to do a Master's degree. A year and a half later he passed it with First Class Honours. He was then again invited by his professors to pursue the Ph.D. degree of the National University of Ireland (Cork). During this programme, he also completed a Diploma in Education at Oxford University and studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. However, he returned to Ireland to write up his Ph.D. thesis. He was not called upon to defend it, and upon submission he was simply asked to leave his home address and go home. This was in January, 1961.

Writing about Bernard Fonlon in 1970, Professor William McCausland Stewart, M.A., D.Litt., Professor of Literature at Bristol University, England, said:

J' ai preside le jury qui a confere au Dr F onlon en 1961 le grade de Docteur (PhD.) de la National University of Ireland.

J' ai ete d' ailleurs deja un des examinateurs de sa These pour le M.A. en 1958, et me trouve donc la position de pouvoir temoigner de la solite de son travail et de l' envergure de ses etudes et de ses recherches dans plusieurs domaines. (Quoted from Who is Bernard F onlon?)

His former Professor and Director of his Ph.D. thesis also wrote a testimony to Professor Fonlon in 1970, including these comments:

His next step was the preparation of a thesis on La Poesie et le Reveil de l'Homme Noir, 1961. He did this under my direction. The work was excellent and was highly praised by our External Examiner. I hope it will be published.

Dr F onlon is, I believe, the most distinguished and outstanding student that I have ever had in my 30 years as Professor and Head of Dept. of Romance Languages: 1939-1969.

Professor EthnaByrne Costigan, M.A., D-es-L., Trinity College, Dublin.

Emeritus Professor of Romance Languages (NUI)

Grand Ufficiale dell "Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana".²

4 Dr Bernard Fonlon Returns Home to Cameroon On his arrival in Buea about February, 1961, Bernard Fonlon (M.A., Dip.Ed.) was first appointed as Executive Officer (a post for non-degree holders). He held his peace and continued to work silently in the Office of the then Prime Minister (Dr John Ngu Foncha) while waiting for the results of his Ph.D. thesis. Later he was raised to the rank of Assistant Administrative Officer, Those were difficult times, a transitional period demanding the spirit of willingness to

serve with dedication, and top intellectuals were often suspected of communism and vilified. Bernard Fonlon was a victim of such gossip.

During the days following the plebiscite, I came home from Ibadan University. Rev. Father Ivo Ndichida had informed me by letter that Bernard Fonlon had returned to Cameroon, so I hurried down to Buea to meet him. It was then exactly ten years since we had parted at Kumba after the Douala journey. Our meeting was a joyful one. We discussed at length such a wide range of issues and subjects that we often stayed up till the small hours of the morning. Yet, though the share of the discipline was his, we would end the talks with the holy rosary.

I accompanied him to his office once and never went again, for it was embarrassing to witness that his daily assignment was to read French papers, extract news and summarise it for the bosses in the Prime Minister's Office. After work, we would go out together and visit his only friends, Mrs Prudencia He-en Chilla and Mrs Paddy Epie, the beautiful Irish widow of the late Epie.

One day, Bernard Fonlon showed me a letter sent by airmail from Ireland. It simply stated: "I am pleased to inform you that your doctoral thesis has been examined and accepted by the jury and the Senate has conferred on you the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Signed (Registrar)." Dr Bernard Fonlon was profoundly pleased and proud of his success, but in his usual manner he kept quiet and made no fuss about it. He told only very few friends. Eventually the news spread, however, and several people came to behold and congratulate this first Cameroonian holder of a Ph.D.

At this time, there was a need to prepare a common national anthem for the imminent Federal Republic of Cameroon, and the task was assigned to Dr Fonlon, the only

perfectly bilingual English-speaking Cameroonian at Buea. He worked with Mr Manfred Epoh, the first Federal Administrator for West Cameroon, who was of Douala origin and, though a francophone, read English very well and spoke Pidgin eloquently. They had copies of the French version of the old anthem which needed to be revised and then rendered in English and French. The final versions would have to be approved by the respective Cameroon Houses of Assembly (East and West) and then presented at the Fouban Constitutional Conference (17-21 July, 1961) for ratification and inclusion in the Revised Constitution before the historic Reunification Day of 1 October, 1961.

This delicate task called for the complete commitment of a citizen who knew and loved his country.' Dr Bernard Fonlon proved himself to be the right man at the right time, polishing and perfecting the English version. Some expatriate Englishmen in the Buea administration produced literal translations for an open and fair competition, but Dr Fonlon's version so outclassed these that only his was adopted, debated and approved by the Southern Cameroons Assembly without an alteration in word or punctuation. This is the Cameroon National Anthem as Dr Bernard Fonlon, the seasoned poet, rendered it.

*O Cameroon, thou Cradle of our fathers,
Holy Shrine where in our midst they now repose,
Their tears and blood and sweat thy soil did water,
On thy hills and valleys once their tillage rose.
Dear fatherland, thy worth no tongue can tell!
How can we ever pay thy due,
Thy welfare we will win in toil and
LOVE AND PEACE, will be to thy name ever true!*

Chorus:

*Land of promise, land of glory!
Thou, of life and joy, our only store!
Thine be honour, thine devotion,
And deep endearment for evermore.*

*From Shari, where the Mungo meanders,
From along the banks of lowly Boumba Stream,
Muster thy sons in Union close around these,
Mighty as the Buea Mountain be their team!
Instil in them the love of gentle ways,
Regret for errors of the past;
Foster, for Mother Africa a loyalty
That true shall remain to the last.³*

This work has stood the test of time, carrying the profound and genuine aspirations of Cameroonian nationhood in a style that is as new today as it ever was a quarter of a century ago.

Dr Fonlon made his first major contribution to Cameroon nation building in the following way. During the Foumban Constitutional Conference, the problem of questionable interpretation and communication arose, and both President A. Ahidjo and Dr J.N. Foncha were notified. William Eteki Mbomoua, a contemporary of Dr Fonlon in Paris, indicated Dr Fonlon's bilingual abilities to President Ahidjo, who summoned him urgently, interviewed him and requested that he take over the interpreting. Dr Foncha was in full agreement. Dr Fonlon dutifully accepted and did a good job to the satisfaction of all parties. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon was signed in Yaoundé on

1 September, 1961.

From then on, during the various preliminary meetings in preparation for the 1 October Reunification event, Dr Fonlon served as interpreter and translator. He was thus playing the role of bridge-builder between the two major cultural groups. Afterwards, the President summoned Dr Fonlon to Yaounde and appointed him as his first Cameroonian Chief of Mission, responsible for the Translation Service at the Presidency of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Sounding out Dr Fonlon and finding him to be a man of great trust, a simple, honest and loyal yet talented man, President Ahidjo (a ruler of very sound common sense and intuition) not only offered him a public office but assimilated him into his own personal family. They remained intimate friends ever after. To ensure that Dr Fonlon's status was secure, the President advised him to enrol in the Professional Corps of the Civil Service. So by 1962, when the Federal University of Cameroon, Yaounde, was established, Dr Fonlon was one of the first to be recruited as Associate Professor (Maitre de Conference), a rank merited because of his Doctorate.

Having moved to Yaoundé for good, having quickly adapted and settled down, and having the privilege of being involved in shaping state matters of the highest concern to present and future generations, Dr Fonlon addressed the West Cameroonians in his powerful foreword to the *Statement on General Policy to the Ebolowa Congress of the Union Camerounaise* by the President General, His Excellency Ahmadou Ahidjo, President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, 4-8 July, 1962. In a forceful appeal to his countrymen, he maintained that "decolonisation and nation building are a Herculean task." (p. xii) The lion was now unleashed and began to charge and roar. Perhaps the Professors who had released

Bernard from the priestly bonds were right.

Bernard N sokika Fonlon had thus come of age, had begun his public mission, and soon emerged as a public figure on the Cameroon political scene.

5 Conclusion This outline of the man Fonlon in his formative days reveals a powerful personality developing his skills to emerge in the fullness of time as a multi-talented adult with special gifts to put at the service of his people. We have no doubt about his Cameroonian roots, his upbringing and profound Christian commitment from extreme youth, his intellectual brilliance and lofty academic credentials, his wide cultural exposure in Africa and Europe, his unusual devotion and dedication to work, his priestly training which moulded him into a philosopher and theologian, his love of music, poetry and the classical arts, his thorough grounding in Latin and ancient classics, his early commitment and preparation as a teacher, his mastery of the French language with the aim of being truly bilingual, and his profound love and loyalty to his friends. Much as he was talented, was he not equally virtuous because of his warmth and humanity, his shunning of wealth and adoption of poverty as a way of life, his simplicity, frankness, boldness and extreme humility, his love and perpetual disposition to serve others? And more epithets could still be proffered of this saintly celibate.

Bernard Fenlon was already 38 years old by 1962, a well-educated and polished intellectual of high integrity, prepared to serve his country and mankind, and he used whatever opportunity came his way to teach and to serve. When he passed away, it was rightly said that Dr Fonlon came to this world apparently with a mission whose attainment remained his perpetual concern; he was well schooled for it and he fulfilled his calling. *Requiescat In Pace.*

Notes

1 Baba Kong is the common address used by the grandchildren. Further investigation into the names of other uncles of Dr Fonlon is necessary.

2 “Mother of the farm” is the title which is given to the leading woman in the village. She is leader in the cultivation of the Fon’s farm.

3 Quoted from *Cameroon Almanac*, 1964. The *Cameroon Almanac* (edited by Dan N. Lantum) was published in Lagos by Daily Times Printers. It featured prominent Cameroonians at home and in Nigeria, such as Professor Victor Anomah Ngu, Professor G.L. Monekosso and others. The venture was a reflection of the author’s own response to the national and political events of the time.

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The Philosophical and Spiritual Dimensions of the Life of Professor Bernard Fonlon

Archbishop Paul Verdžekov

1 Background No account of Bernard Fonlon's life can be considered complete if it does not mention the ideal to which he ardently aspired from his boyhood days, namely the Catholic Priesthood. The man who, more than anybody else, aroused that aspiration in Bernard's heart, in the middle of the 1930s, was an Irish Mill Hill missionary, Father Thomas Burke Kennedy. As Bernard himself testifies, "It was from him [Father Burke Kennedy] that I really first began to admire the Roman Catholic Priesthood, and to aspire after it. He was largely responsible for my endeavour to achieve that goal; an effort which took fifteen years, of labour and study. I failed."¹

In January 1948, at the age of 23, Bernard entered St Paul's Major Seminary, Okpuala, Nigeria, to commence the seven-year course of Higher Studies for the Catholic Priesthood. The first three years were given over completely to an intensive and extensive study of Philosophy. As defined in Charles Boyer's *Cursus Philosophiae ad Usum Seminariorum*, which Bernard was to cherish and to carry about with him for the rest of his life, philosophy is said to be the "Scientia rerum per ultimas causas naturali rationis lumine comparata". It is a knowledge of things that exist, grasped either directly or through an analysis and demonstration of their ultimate causes, knowledge that is attained through human reason alone.

In the History of Philosophy, Bernard was guided to

make a critical study of the formation and development of philosophy and its associated concepts from their first ascertainable appearance to the present time. This study was far from being a mere account or presentation of what philosophers have said in the course of history. Rather it was a study carried out in such a way that by “coming to grasp the basic principles of the various [philosophical] systems, students will hold what is shown to be true among them, and be able to detect the roots of errors and disprove them”.²

In Systematic Philosophy, Bernard’s studies followed the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. These studies, “based on a philosophical heritage which is perennially valid”,³ engage the student in an intense effort to gain an insight into the nature of reality by induction from the facts of experience.

The content of Scholastic Philosophy comprises several sciences: Logic, Cosmology and Psychology; Ethics or Moral Philosophy; and Metaphysics. It seems that it was metaphysics, the philosophical science having as its object Being as being, which had the most profound influence on Bernard’s life and work. So thoroughly did he absorb and assimilate this discipline, and so profoundly was his mind shaped by its principles, that he was able to apply to the commonest everyday problems, with admirable clarity of exposition and cogency of argument, such metaphysical principles and notions as Act and Potency, the Transcendentals (Unum, Verum, Bonum and Pulchrum), the Categories of Aristotle, and Causality. In Bernard’s own words:

It is Metaphysics that is Philosophy in the strictest sense of the term. Philosophy, therefore, is the science of Being as being, the science which treats of the principles and causes and qualities, inherent in all things, whatever they may be, merely from this alone that they are, that they

*exist. Since Being is the final, most universal property of things, it follows, consequently, that philosophy is the science which concerns itself with the final, ultimate, most universal, all-embracing, principles or causes of the total Universe.*⁴

The study of Metaphysics enabled Bernard to understand that the human mind is capable of discovering, by means of a realistic ontology, transcendental values and ends, and that it can arrive at an affirmation of a personal Absolute and Creator of the Universe.

The purpose of these philosophical studies was to equip the future priest with the intellectual tools and principles with which to grapple with those fundamental problems that confront mankind in every age:

the meaning of life and death; the meaning of good and evil; the basis of true values; the dignity and rights of the human person; the confrontation between culture and a spiritual heritage; the scandal of suffering, injustice, oppression and violence; the nature and law of love; the order and disorder in nature; the problems of education, authority and freedom; the meaning of history and progress; the mystery of the transcendent; and finally, at the depth of all these problems, God, His existence, His personal characteristics and His providence.

*. . . Such questions as these pertain to the specific sphere of philosophy, which, transcending all merely exterior and partial aspects of phenomena, addresses itself to the whole of reality, seeking to comprehend and to explain it in the light of ultimate causes.*⁵

I am persuaded that Bernard's life and work, his view of reality and personal attitude to life, cannot be properly understood without an awareness of the philosophical studies that he pursued between January 1948 and December 1950. Philosophy, coupled with the theological studies in which he

was deeply engaged for a further three years, gave his mind, as he himself testifies, “a turn and bent and discipline which few other studies are able to instil.”

2 Public life In November, 1953, Bernard went through the greatest crisis of his life. On the threshold of Major Orders, and only six or eight months to the final goal of Priesthood, he was asked to leave the Seminary. The palm of victory eluded him, forever, at the very moment when he thought it was within his grasp. But it was without any rancour or bitterness that he left the Seminary.

The next obvious thing for him was to find out what to do with his life. On Monday, 6 September, 1954, nine months after leaving the Seminary, he noted in his diary that perhaps he was headed for a share in the leadership of the people of Cameroon. If that were to be the case, he noted, then he must strive to acquire the qualities that he listed as: Comprehensive Learning, Death to the World, Moral Energy, Love of People, Economic Independence, Assiduous Industry, Concord with Co-workers, and Union with God. The following month, he was admitted to University College, Cork, at the beginning of a long university career that took him from the National University of Ireland to the Sorbonne in Paris and to the University of Oxford. Those were the years during which Cameroonians were agitating for Reunification, and Bernard's chief obsession “was on getting myself as good and as thorough a training as I could, in order to help in building the re-united country - if it came”. That in fact was the advice which his Spiritual Director, Father Thomas Ronayne, C.S.Sp., gave him on the day he left the Seminary: “Get yourself an education such that when you speak, people will listen.”

Very soon after his return home in 1961, Bernard was in

fact called upon to participate in the leadership of the emerging nation. He served successively as *Charge de Mission* in the President's Office, Member of the Federal Parliament, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Transport, Post and Telecommunications, and finally as Minister of Health. Until his death, he was a member of the Central Committee of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, the nation's only political party.

In his role as a leader and as a public servant, Bernard, who was no ivory tower intellectual, never failed to recognise the value of technical competence and empirical accuracy in issues of public policy. Quite evidently, these are prerequisites for the formulation and execution of just and effective decisions in the life of a nation. But he argued, in season and out of season, that technical competence and empirical accuracy are not enough. Moral judgement, based upon sound philosophy, is an essential element. The formulation of laws, the elaboration of social reforms, and many political and economic decisions "carry within themselves philosophical pre-suppositions and consequences which need to be clearly and critically evaluated..."⁶

Since political and economic decisions affect human beings, those issues must also be seen as moral issues, whose adequate solution cannot exclude the philosophical values that are inherent in them. Consequently, Bernard argued that public policy cannot be left to technicians alone, or to special interest groups. In the Government Ministries entrusted to him, he endeavoured to prove that "even Politics and Government can be philosophical, that administration is best when it is subject to reason and principle and not when it is based on scheming and expediency." To bring home to his fellow Cameroonians the truth of the fact that a sound philosophical approach is needed in the running of public

affairs, Bernard frequently quoted Plato's dictum that either philosophers must be kings or kings philosophers:

*Unless, philosophers bear kingly rule in cities, or those who are now called kings and princes become genuine and adequate philosophers, and political power and philosophy are brought together, and unless the numerous natures who at present pursue either politics or philosophy, the one to the exclusion of the other, are forcibly debarred from this behaviour, there will be no respite from evil, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor, I fancy, for humanity.*⁷

3 Concrete Examples One or two examples might help to illustrate how Bernard constantly brought his philosophical studies to bear upon the search for solutions to issues of public policy and welfare.

In 1964, the transitional period of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon was drawing to a close. "The top leaders of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) were undergoing pressure from their followers and West Cameroon intellectuals to define a set of goals not only for the West Cameroon regime, but for the whole country".⁸ It was in response to the questions raised by those who were "dissatisfied with the seeming lack of direction and influence of the Buea regime in national politics" that Bernard drew up a document entitled *Presentation of the KNDP Memorandum of 1st August 1964*.⁹ This document, though ultimately rejected, is an illustration of how the metaphysical principles of causality could be applied to the problems facing the KNDP in its relation to the other main political party, the *Union Camerounaise* (UC).

The absence of proper discussion and agreement, Bernard maintained, would lead to confusion or imbalance. The particular purpose was the welding into unity of the

peoples and cultures of Cameroon, thus giving the country the role of pilot in the struggle for African unity. The material cause was concrete (the two entities, East and West Cameroon, with their populations and resources) and spiritual (the principal cultures that had met in the Federation). The formal cause, that is, the form and shape that the makers chose to give to the matter in hand, was to be the Constitution of the Federation. "Arbitrary absorption has been declared anathema. We have decided that whatever is true and good and beautiful shall live and move and have its being and work in concert with the rest within this federal framework. We have chosen Diversity in Unity, Unity in Diversity."

At the end of these philosophical considerations, Bernard drew from them six precise practical proposals clearly stating the aims of the KNDP. The main claims revolved around the questions of institutionalised discussion, negotiation and agreement between the two parties in the Government Coalition. In addition, since the transitional period of the Federal Constitution was coming to a close, one proposal called for the revision of that constitution to provide for a Council of Ministers in which all Government projects would be freely, frankly and fully debated before their adoption by the Head of State or by the Government. If, in the task of nation-building, he concluded, the inherent laws addressed to all builders in the Sermon on the Mount were observed, the UC-KNDP Coalition would be:

like a wise man who built his house upon a rock; and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house but it did not fall; for it was founded upon a rock.

However, all these proposals came to nought, for they

were rejected outright by the *Union Camerounaise*.

In 1966, Bernard wrote "The Task of Today", a serial which appeared in the *Cameroon Times* newspaper. Drawing upon the accumulated wisdom of thinkers, ancient and modern, and upon his own studies, he explored such topics as the objectives that should be pursued by the Government of the then Federated State of West Cameroon, the meaning of Democracy, of Right, Equality and Liberty, the meaning of full, free and frank debate, the meaning of the Separation of Powers, and, finally, the meaning and need for Compromise in the conduct of public affairs. If this article was read with avidity and universal enthusiasm by the Cameroon public, it was because Bernard had the rare knack of putting his principles into clear language, and making their relevance and practical application to our political, economic and social situation very plain for all to see.

It was Bernard's firm conviction, a conviction that he strove to put into practice in his own life, that the thinker-scholar should participate in public affairs and that, in so doing, he should endeavour to be the *Keeper of the Public Conscience*. To fulfil such a lofty role, the thinker-scholar would have to be *integer vitae scelerisque purus* - pure of life and free from sin (Horace) - and, at the same time, should be fearless, like Socrates, never betraying truth, goodness and justice for any reason whatsoever. That was the role that Bernard endeavoured to play in Government and in the Central Committee of the Cameroon National Union (CNU), later the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). As can be expected, not everyone agreed with the principles for which he stood, and which he continued to proclaim, welcome or unwelcome, until his death. Writing about Bernard's role in the Central Committee of the CNU, an informed observer commented:

Seul le docteur Fonlon persistera longtemps dans ses "incartades". Mais celles-ci étaient regardées par les autres membres du comité central avec condescendance, comme s'il s'agissait des pitreries d'un bouffon auxquelles on avait fini par s'habituer. Même si elles exprimaient quelques rudes vérités, on semblait s'être accordé qu'elles ne méritaient que le sourire.¹¹

An entry in Bernard's Diary for 14 November, 1953, shows that he had trained himself to face such reactions. He resolved to follow the noble lead of Abraham Lincoln who, having been called "a damned fool" by Stanton, his Secretary for War, for signing a certain order, replied with great composure: "If Stanton says that I am a damned fool, *then I must be*, for he is nearly always right." Elsewhere, Bernard maintained that "those who mock me, those who make me hang my head in shame, those who slash me with pen and tongue, those who see no good in what I do, shall be counted my best benefactors; they are offering me invaluable chances for the growth of my soul" (Diary, 8 December, 1952).

4 Philosophy and University Studies About October, 1971, Bernard was dismissed from the Government. He then returned, as he put it, no doubt paraphrasing his revered master, Cardinal Newman, "to the peaceful groves of academe".

Four years earlier, on 10 December 1967, Bernard had given an important Address to the Association of Christian Students of the University of Yaounde on the participation of Christian students in national development. He used the occasion to argue forcefully in favour of the prominence of

Philosophy in university studies. The university, according to Newman, should be:

*a sort of ideal land, where the archetypes of the great and the fair are found in substantial being, and all departments of truth are explored, and all diversities of intellectual power exhibited, where taste and philosophy are majestically enthroned as in a royal court, where there is no sovereignty but that of mind, and no nobility but that of genius, where professors are rulers and princes do homage.*¹²

The participation of Christian university students in national development, he maintained, consists in preparing themselves for their future role in the nation. The acquisition of solid competence in one's specific area of studies must be combined with a scientific and philosophical spirit. In order to make a genuine contribution to national development, however, the university formation of the Christian student must include an equally intense moral education, because the most highly qualified expert who lacks a sense of duty will be an obstacle rather than a promoter of national development.

These ideas were expanded in a major study, *To Every African Freshman or The Nature, End and purpose of University Studies*, a work carried out over nearly five years, 1965-69. If life were not so brief, he argued, or the period for study not so short, the ideal would be that all university education would include a thorough study of the philosophical disciplines. Since such an approach is impossible, the next best thing is that training in each science should include the branch of philosophy on which that science is based, or which has a particular relevance to it. Thus, for example, the study of Moral Philosophy or Ethics would provide a firm foundation for disciplines such as Law or Political Science. In 1979, this issue was taken up again in a study entitled, *To*

Every African Freshman Ten Years After: An Academic Testament (Abbia, 34-35-36-37, June 1979). There the author reiterated his conviction that “if the University does not teach a student to think, it has taught him nothing of genuine worth, has failed wide of its mark.”

Without denying the merits of the case so strongly made by Professor Fonlon, one may ask whether he sufficiently addressed some of the difficulties in the way of his programme. The modern tendency to reduce *homo sapiens* to *homo faber*, and all knowledge to the methods of the positive sciences; the complex and contradictory nature of philosophical pluralism that makes synthesis for the benefit of students extremely difficult; and the cultural climate which attunes the young more to images than reflection ¹³ all stand in the way.

However, in the Department of African Literature of the University of Yaounde, Bernard made certain that his students did not overlook the philosophical aspects of their chosen discipline, in particular the qualities that confer *beauty* on a piece of literature, “the Beautiful being one of the expressions, or one of the Metaphysical *properties* of being.”

Both in Government and in the University, Bernard made it very plain that while he was a convinced votary of *Secularity*, he was an implacable foe of *Secularism*. Secularity means that the Church, or organised religion, keeps out of the exercise of temporal power, while the State for its part respects the independence of the Church and refrains from any interference in her life. As Pope John Paul II declared at the Unity Palace, Yaounde, on Monday 12 August, 1985, the Church “desires that its religious purpose, methods and doctrine - which is a message of spiritual life before entailing the consequence of morality - be not confused with those of the State. It always remains free in its judgement on moral

realities.” Secularity therefore also means that there is no “State Religion”, that the State does not favour one religion to the detriment of others, but promotes the common good by assuring, in an impartial manner, and for all the citizens, the social conditions for the full exercise of religious freedom.

Secularism, in contrast, is a philosophy or attitude which, both in theory and in practice, rejects faith and all that proceeds therefrom. Its purpose is the complete unhallowing of life and of the world, the elimination of any manifestation of religious faith in public and social life, and its relegation “to the sacristy”. It is a philosophy that Bernard rejected completely. It deeply saddened and alarmed him to notice how secularistic tendencies were making steady inroads into Cameroonian society, especially “education policies which not only ignore, or flout” the primacy of Morality and of Religious Studies at all levels of Education, but which even have the insolence to jeer at the idea of granting a place to such studies in the educational system.

In his last article published in *Abbia* in May, 1982, four years and three months before his death, Bernard denounced one of the aspects of secularism thus:

*If anyone in charge of education, forgetful of Sophocles’
warning that*

Of happiness the crown

And chiefest part is wisdom

And to hold the gods in awe.

shall declare that no certificate, diploma or degree gained in religious studies of Coran or Bible or Tradition (supreme studies) shall be recognized by the state under the misguided and spurious argument that the state is lay. forgetful of this that a lay state is not an atheist state, let him be anathema. For, he inculcates into the minds of the young that, if

religion counts for nothing in their studies, it counts for nothing in their lives - an extremely dangerous mentality that spells the bane of the Republic, the woe of the Commonwealth, the doom of the Common-weal.

5 Spirituality I believe many of his past students would readily agree that Bernard succeeded in operating a solid synthesis between his intellectual and spiritual life. He was a believer in God, and would have shrunk back in horror at any suggestion that he should ever put his Catholic faith in a separate compartment of his life.

The principles of Moral Philosophy (Ethics) which maintain that man's Summum Bonum, or highest good, consists in happiness, and that this happiness consists in God alone, made a very deep and lasting impression on Professor Fonlon. From his Major Seminary days until his death, the conviction that Summum Bonum is God, and God alone, exercised the most powerful grip on his mind and heart, and manifested itself in every aspect of his life, even in the smallest details. St Augustine's celebrated saying on this point was ever on his lips, and he quoted it countless times in his writings:

Fecisti nos ad te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in teo

(Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are
restless until they rest in Thee.)

In addition to the Word of God, the Sacraments and Prayer as the obligatory means of attaining union with God, Bernard considered the study of the lives of saintly men, and the imitation of their example, as one of the best means to make progress in virtue. Such lives, he wrote, must become

the warp and woof of his daily thoughts, and the subject of constant study and perennial meditation; they must grip his mind so that whenever an occasion arose for the practice of these virtues, he would naturally and spontaneously do so. The Great Lives which he chose as the special models for his own spiritual life were those of S t Augustine, John Henry Cardinal Newman and the Mahatma Gandhi.

For a Catholic such as Bernard was, the choice of St Augustine and Cardinal Newman can be taken as normal. What probably needs explanation is the inclusion of Gandhi, a Hindu. An entry in his Diary (20 February, 1953) gives an idea:

I take a deep interest in the lives of great men, and this has sometimes been frowned upon, when the heroes were not saints in the Church's sense. Once, during my Philosophy Course, I had to read a paper before the class in which paper I discussed, according to the philosophical principles of the beautiful, a character, a personality, which I considered sublime. I shall not forget the reaction of the class and of the professor, when I announced that I had chosen, as my hero, the celebrated Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi. The fellows looked up surprised, almost stunned; and the professor wore a disapproving pout.

But, before I was halfway through, it was evident that their sentiments were completely changed; and, when I finished reading, the professor remarked, "I have learned something today."

What Bernard admired most in the Mahatma was his austere asceticism, his life of poverty, and, in particular, his "influence" in the sense in which Newman uses that word. It was a great joy to him to learn that Pope John Paul II began his Pastoral Visit to India in February, 1986, with a pilgrimage to Raj Ghat, dedicated to the illustrious Mahatma Gandhi, a man of God who manifested in his life the sublime teachings

of the Sermon on the Mount.

In the early 1950s, while looking forward to his expected ordination which never came, Bernard adopted and recorded in his Diary certain laws and guidelines for his spiritual life. These were laws of simplicity of lifestyle, of ruthless detachment from wealth, ease and pleasure, of drastic discipline of the appetites, of kindness, of humility and acceptance of humiliations, of submission to God's will, and of self-effacement. Those who knew him at close hand can testify that he held on to those principles and truly lived them for the rest of his life.

I am persuaded that one of Bernard's deep spiritual qualities lies in the manner in which he took his dismissal from the Seminary, an experience that brought him close to a nervous breakdown. On that occasion, he wrote in his Diary (27 November, 1953):

The things that are happening to me, at present, are making one idea clearer and clearer to my mind, from day to day - the immense value of humiliation. A man left to himself - with everything as his heart desires, with success wherever he puts his hand - will end up in pride as surely as a bubble swells and rises; and rises but to burst; for, when a man gets drunk with a sense of his own importance, his fall is inevitable; and the higher he has risen, the greater the force with which he comes crashing to the ground.

Humiliation brings you down on your knees. brings you back to yourself. and deflates you like men deflate a balloon: you see your own misery; and it dawns upon you that you are nothing; and, if you respond to the touch of grace. and bow under your humiliation in silence and gratitude; it is then you will hear the voice of God.

Moved by these thoughts, I submit myself wholeheartedly to my present lot. Indeed. it is with sentiments of deep gratitude that I do so.

For I am positive that the day will come when, seeing the good it shall have done to me. I will feel like dancing in the very street. that I had the experience I am going through today. And being so certain of this. I hasten to give thanks in the very throes of my agony; I hasten to give thanks to God before the benefits arrive.

Bernard was the first to recognize that Father James O'Neil, C.S.Sp., the ReclO^r who dismissed him. acted with the utmost sincerity. *Coram Domino. Utissima conscientia.* His esteem and affection for Father O'Neill never once foundered or wavered. And after Father O'Neill's death, Bernard mourned him with unalloyed piety, writing in his memory a poem entitled "Lament for James O'Neill", full of sincere love for his former teacher and Rector.

6 Formation of Future Priests Bernard's dismissal from the Seminary in no way diminished his deep attachment to the ideals of the Catholic Priesthood, for whose attainment he had consecrated so many years of his youth. His interest in Seminary Studies remained as keen as ever, and he never lost a chance of encouraging young Seminarians to strive to reach that sublime goal which he himself had failed to attain.

When he learnt that the Bishops of Buea and Bamenda had obtained the authorisation of the Holy See to erect a Major Seminary at Bambui, Bernard felt that it was his sacred duty to make a contribution. This took the form of an *Open Letter to the Bishops of Buea and Bamenda* (16 September, 1973). He was persuaded that his right and duty were fully justified by the following words of the Second Vatican Council:

An individual layman, by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which he may enjoy, is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the

Church. When occasions arise, let this be done through the agencies set up by the Church for this purpose. Let it always be done in truth, in courage, and in prudence, with reverence and charity toward those who by reason of their sacred office represent the person of Christ.¹⁴

In his *Open Letter*, Bernard pleaded for two essential qualities in all those who would pass through the new Major Seminary, namely saintliness and learning. As to the first requirement, saintliness, he argued forcefully for *discipline* and *poverty* in the life of every priest:

In a world that is rank and rotten with materialism, when hedonism is the principal philosophy, where luxury is the summum bonum; there is the crying need for dedicated souls who would go to the other extreme and espouse the spirit of genuine religion, the spirit of poverty, the spirit of austere abstemiousness, in order to wage war against the onslaught of materialist godlessness.

For this, one thing is absolutely necessary – Discipline; discipline of the mind, discipline of the heart, discipline of the will discipline not imposed from without by fear, but a free and willit discipline, welling from within, stemming from deep a, unshakable convictions!

Coming from Bernard, these ideas carried enormous weight, since he was already considered, in his own right, the very epitome of discipline, self-restraint and abstemiousness.

As to the second requirement, learning, Bernard argued that the motto of the Seminary, as regards philosophical and theological studies, should be a single word: *“Thorough; no superficiality should be given quarter.”*

The *Open Letter* generated heated discussion in the Church and in society at large; it evoked wide interest and controversy far beyond the borders of Cameroon. Reactions, some laudatory, others critical, poured in to Cameroon

Panorama (Buea), the magazine that had published the Letter. No one remained indifferent.

Laudatory comments came from Bishops in Cameroon and Nigeria. The five Bishops of the Governing Board of the Major Seminary of Peramiho (Tanzania) expressed complete agreement with the essential contents of the *Open Letter*, and asked for more copies for their Clergy and Seminarians. The Rector of the Pontifical College of St Peter me Apostle in Rome, Father Mathias Schneider, S.V.D., declared that there was a lot in the letter “which should be listened to by rectors of Seminaries or by Bishops of other countries”. Favourable and sometimes critical comments came from the University of Lagos, Nigeria; from St Joseph’s College, Mill Hill, London; from the Benedictine Monastery of Mount Febe, Yaounde; and from the then rector of the Major Seminary, Bambui, Dr Christian Wiyghan Tumi, now Archbishop of Garoua.

Few challenged Bernard’s credentials for expressing his mind on the subject, though there was no lack of those who challenged the right of the Laity to make such an address. However, it is no exaggeration to say that the *Open Letter* is a document of priceless and perennial value, one that can always be profitably consulted by those who have responsibility for the formation of the future priests of Cameroon.

7 Culture As everyone knows, Professor Fonlon was one of the founders of *Abbia*, the *Cameroon Cultural Review*, whose maiden issue appeared in 1963. He was the first Director of the prestigious review, and held the position until his death. To his role as Director of *Abbia*, as to everything else, Bernard brought the principles of philosophy that had moulded his entire life. This is clearly illustrated in the six-

page” A Word of Introduction” in the first issue (pp. 19-24), where he spelled out with remarkable simplicity the philosophical principles that should constitute the guiding star of the Review:

Were I asked to suggest a motto for this Review, to lay down the principles that should guide those who undertake to contribute to its columns, I would have no hesitation whatsoever; I have already made these principles the burden of this article, namely, the transcendental principles of being: Verum, Bonum, pulchrum . the True, the Good and the Beautiful.

A careful examination of all the issues of the Review to date will reveal that its director, editors and contributors strove to remain faithful to those ideals.

The purpose of Culture, Bernard maintained, was to help man to achieve the fullness of his being and thereby real happiness. The genuine seeker after the true, the good and the beautiful, which together make up a people’s culture, will probably arrive ultimately at an acknowledgement of Him who is Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Bernard’s understanding of Beauty was essentially that (the philosopher St Augustine, who finally discovered the meaning of the beautiful things of this world:

Ea me tenebant longe a te, quae si in te non essent. Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam; coruscasti, splendisti et fugasti caecitatem meam ...

(The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all. You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of 15 deafness ...)

In his approach to the rehabilitation of African culture (*Abbia*, 16, March 1967, p.22) Bernard advanced, twenty years ago, ideas that seem to me fundamentally relevant to what is known in the Catholic Church today as “Inculturation”. Cultural rehabilitation, he said, should steer clear of two extremes: “on the one hand, the imperialist arrogance which declared everything African as only fit for the scrap-heap and the dust-bin, and, on the other hand, the overly enthusiastic and rather naive tendency to laud every aspect of African culture as if it were the quintessence of human achievement.” He felt that the Sequence of the Mass in the Catholic Liturgy for Pentecost Sunday aptly expresses what our policy should be:

Lava quod est sordidum, riga quod est aridum, sana quod est saucium; flecte quod est rigidum, fove quod est frigidum, rege quod est devium.

(Cleanse the sordid, water the arid, heal the wounded; render the rigid pliant, make the frigid warm, and the crooked straight.)

On Tuesday, 13 August, 1985, just one year before his death, Bernard listened, with consummate joy and delight, to the Address which Pope John Paul II delivered to Cameroon’s intellectuals, university teachers and students at Yaounde, an address in which the Pontiff stressed the supreme importance of Philosophy in all university studies, and at the same time called upon Christian intellectuals to make their own contribution towards the urgent and necessary task of the “inculturation” of Christianity in Cameroon. Bernard was extremely happy and grateful to hear the Supreme Pontiff underscoring, on Cameroon soil and to the nation’s elite, the cherished ideas that he had been

tirelessly advocating throughout his life as an academic, namely that

*the University should seek to acquire, to develop, and possess, in fullness, the True, the Good, and the Beautiful and the Sublime in substantial being, should strive to explore all departments of knowledge, should exhibit all diversities of Intellectual Power ... in other words, in order to promote these exalted aims, it should make perennial war against mindlessness, against mediocrity and ineptitude, against whatever smacks of the shoddy, should allow no room whatsoever within its domain to intrigue and expediency.*¹⁶

8 Conclusion Human beings look to philosophy and “to the various religions for answers to those profound mysteries of the human condition which, today even as in olden times, deeply stir the human heart- What is the meaning and purpose of our life? . . . What is the truth about death, judgement, and retribution beyond the grave? What, finally, is the ultimate and unutterable mystery which engulfs our being, and whence we take our rise, and whither our journey leads us?”

Bernard, too, often thought about these questions. It is with his attempt to answer them, an attempt which sums up his philosophy of human life, that we shall conclude. At Enugu, on Friday, 10 July, 1953, looking ahead to his own death, Bernard made this entry in his Diary:

It is the saddest of things for a man to work himself to death, only to find, at the last, that his was a wasted life, having been spent but for self; for the greatest name that a man can make on earth is but one huge bubble, brilliant, dazzling, that bursts and all is gone!

Therefore, I take the warning while life is mine: I will never go to do good on my own: it is God who has given me my talents and my life, and these shall be spent for Him. Before I undertake anything, I must lay it at His feet. If, from the exercise of the said talents, I gain anything in the shape of applause or thanks, I must put them all before Him: nothing for myself, all for Him alone.

Looking at his life, one can say that Professor Fonlon was faithful, in a very outstanding degree, to the sublime principles, philosophical, theological and spiritual, that governed his life and everything he undertook, from his tenderest years until his last breath.

Notes

1 Bernard Fonlon, *As I See It*. Buea: Catholic Press, 1971, p. 18.

2 Second Vatican Council, Decree *Optatum Totius*, n. 15.

3 Decree *Optatum Totius*, n. 15.

4 *Abbia*, 24, January-April, 1970, p. 44.

5 *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Prot. 137/65, Rome, 1972.

6 *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*.

7 Plato, *The Republic*, Book V, Everyman's Library, p. 166.

8 W.R. Johnson, *The Cameroon Federation*. Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 290.

9 Bernard Fonlon, *Presentation of the KNDP Memorandum of the 1st of August 1964*. Unpublished, p. 1.

10 Cf. J-F. Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1979, pp. 149-50.

11 H. Bandolo, *La Flamme et la Fumee*. Yaounde: Editions SOPECAM, 1985, p. 253.

12 Quoted in *Abbia*, 34-35-36-37, June, 1979, p. 13. 13 Cf. *The Study of Philosophy in Seminaries*.

14 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 37.

15 *Confessions*, 10,27.

16 Bernard Fonlon, "To Every African Freshman Ten Years After: An Academic Testament", *Abbia*, 34-35-36-37, June, 1979, p.16.

17 Second Vatican Council, *Nostrae Aetate*, n. 1.





Reflections on the Educational Writings of Bernard Fonlon

Leke I. Tambo

Bernard Fonlon's writings span a variety of issues, ranging from politics through culture and literature to religion, morality and education. The main objective of this paper is to identify and discuss his educational ideas, and for our purpose the discussion is limited to the period from 1964 to 1986. During these years, Professor Fonlon was particularly concerned about (1) bilingual education, (2) the nature and purpose of university studies and (3) education for the Holy Priesthood. This study will focus on these themes and attempt to describe his pedagogical orientation.

1 Fonlon on Bilingual Education Professor Fonlon returned home from Europe at the time of the unification of the former British Cameroon and the Republic of Cameroon in an independent Federal Republic of Cameroon. Although each of the federated states of the Republic naturally leaned more on its inherited colonial language, at the federal level French and English were accorded equal status by the constitution. Secondary and higher education became the responsibility of the Federal Government, while primary education came under the authority of the federated states.

Following the creation of the Federal University of Cameroon in 1962 (Ejedepang-Koge, 1985:37), there was a great deal of debate and discussion, though much of it informal, regarding the status of French and English in the new institution. In the light of the UNESCO Study Group

Report of 1962, the language debate could be seen from three vantage points:

(1) East Cameroon could cause French to be imposed as the language of instruction at the University level.

(2) A “double” system could be set up so that anglophones would study only in English and francophones only in French.

(3) Some other arrangement could be worked out that would be more fitting for the bilingual nature of the young republic.

Professor Fonlon, one of the few truly bilingual Cameroonians at that time, came out in support of the third alternative. He wrote

in 1964:

The University recently started in Yaounde is supposed to be a bilingual University. But the nature of its bilingualism needs to be defined clearly and efforts made right from the start, to put that definition into effect ... it would be enough for our bilingual university that lectures can be given in it in either language and that provision be made for both languages to be adequately represented on the staff. (Abbia, 4)

To ensure that such a proposal would work, he recommended that the earlier stages of the education system be made to bear the burden of bilingualism. He stated the case for early bilingualism in very strong terms:

My contention, repeated now ad nauseam, is that both English and French should be taught together from the very start of the

primary school.

Professor Fonlon's proposal can be described as extremely bold

for the time, since it ran contrary to current thinking. The West Cameroon Educational Policy Statement of 1963 had argued:

In the opinion of the Government, French should not be taught to persons who have not acquired a solid foundation in English, as this would lead to a maladjustment, and might well result in pidgin becoming the lingua franca of a large section of the population, who had started on the road to English, learnt it in a small degree, and had then become diverted to the learning of French.

Studies in multilingual education, however, generally support the view held by Professor Fonlon. To cite one of these:

True bilingual education requires the full use of both languages (L1 and L2) as vehicles of culture and instruction ... language takes up a moulding value in personality development only if it .. permeates the thought process and the effective structures of the individual communicator. And this can take place only when language is not merely an object of study but a way of life and thought. This principle forms the basis of all successful programmes in bilingual education, especially at the primary school level. (Mackey, 1976)

There are other indications of the soundness of Professor Fonlon's position. The French immersion programme in Canada, whereby anglophone children are made to study at the primary level entirely in French, and francophone children entirely in English, is a notable example. Recently in

Cameroon, the President of the Republic, Paul Biya, supported the case for early bilingualism with these words:

I am not an expert on education, but I have been made to understand that young children are capable of learning languages very fast. They can learn two, perhaps even three or four. It is at this stage that bilingualism should be introduced from the onset. (Cameroon Tribune, 27 Feb. 1987)

2 Fonlon at the University Professor Fonlon's interest in education appears to centre more on the university than on any other part of higher education or level of the education system. A notable exception, his interest in education for the Holy Priesthood, is discussed below.

His educational thinking was characteristically long-sighted and pragmatic, in the sense that he tended to identify issues or problems first at the university level, and then in his search for solutions he pointed out the contribution that the earlier stages of the education system could make. For example, he saw early bilingualism as a means of addressing the problem of bilingual teaching and learning at the university. When, in his last years, he threw his weight behind a project between the universities of Guelph and Yaounde, whose aim is in part to encourage creative teaching at the primary and secondary levels in Cameroon, he saw the project essentially as an effort to prepare pupils for creative writing at the university. In the preamble to the document that ushered in the Guelph-Yaounde Project (1981), he emphasized: "the project should begin . . . with young children in primary and secondary school".

Professor Fonlon's thinking about the university in general and the Cameroon University in particular is

traditional and idealistic. His ideas were shaped mainly by his experiences as a student at Oxford, at the Sorbonne and at the National University of Ireland (NUI) at Cork. If we add to this background his Catholic education extending to 14 years of seminary studies (*Open Letter to the Bishops of Buea and Bamenda*, 1973:3), the picture of a classical university thinker emerges. His idol in this matter was Cardinal Newman and the model of the University he proposed was essentially Newman's. He declared in the *Credo* (1977):

I believe in John Henry Cardinal Newman, Fellow of Oriel and first Rector of the Catholic University of Dublin. I believe with him that the University should be an ideal land, a critical metropolis of learning, where the True, the Good and the Sublime should be found in substantial being. I believe with Newman that in the University there should be no sovereignty but that of the mind, no nobility but that of Genius.

Professor Fonlon's main ideas on the University are contained in two publications: *To Every African Freshman or the Nature, the End and the Purpose of University Studies* (1969) and *The Genuine Intellectual* (1978), the second being essentially an expansion of the first. It is not within the scope of this essay to discuss their contents exhaustively, but a few pertinent ideas are worth examining.

According to Professor Fonlon, the University has a two-fold task, teaching and research, and its students should not be "the mindless mob, but the talented tenth". For an institution of higher learning to be recognized as a university, he maintained, it must possess the "indivisible trinity": the university library, the university bookshop and the university press. University studies should be scientific and

philosophical. He abhorred the “cité universitaire with its *intendants* of no academic standing and prestige” and extolled “a system where undergraduates live under a seasoned fatherly master ... Where the sexes live in different halls”.

Among the contemporary national models of university education, the one that appealed to him most was the British. He wrote in 1969:

When I survey the rise and growth of this noble institution, the University, from ancient days to our time, / pay homage to Alexander the Great, to the Church and the Monasteries of the Dark Ages, to Carolus Magnus, alias Charlemagne or Charles the Great; but insofar as the University of our time is concerned, I salute John Bull.

When Professor Fonlon put forward these strong convictions about the University, he obviously had in mind as his immediate audience the students, faculty, administrators and political authorities concerned with the young University of Cameroon. To an extent, he succeeded in getting some of them to support his views. The strongest evidence of his influence is seen in the acknowledgement of his writings by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Yaounde in 1976. In an address on the occasion of the formal opening of the academic year, the Vice-Chancellor counselled:

I should like to call your special attention to an excellent treatise ... written and published by Dr Bernard Fonlon. It is entitled To Every African Freshman ... I have been assured that a French edition is soon to be published for the benefit of our francophone compatriots. Don't let the title of the booklet fool you! Dr Fonlon usually addresses important and weighty matters to the general public by pretending to address them to a particular class of the public. So although the book bears in its title Freshman, its contents will instruct, enthral and edify

all educated people, students and professors alike. It is a real masterpiece and I very strongly recommend it to anyone who wants to understand more clearly and more deeply what science and scientific method are about.

In retrospect, Professor Fonlon's ideas on the University were extremely strong and sound, and mainly in a conservative and classical sense, though others may have preferred to advance a more specifically African model, such as that proposed by the Accra Workshop (1972).

3 Fonlon on Education for the Holy Priesthood When one reflects on Professor Fonlon's life, work and thought, one may see him as a personality who was many things to many people. To some people he was a politician, yet many of his political peers did not really see him as a conventional member of their corps; to many he was a university man par excellence, yet university dons tended to see him as somewhat different from the rest of them; and to others he was a true church person, yet he did not belong to the clerical cadre.

Whatever may be said about Bernard Fonlon, there can be no denying that he was a deeply spiritual person. Indeed, in spite of all his great achievements, he tended to consider himself in some ways a failure for missing the Catholic priesthood after years of studies and preparation. To a large extent, his life was regulated by the vows he had taken in the course of those years, and he was always concerned about developments in the Church in Cameroon. It was on this matter that in 1973 he wrote an open letter to two bishops in Cameroon regarding the establishment of a seminary for their dioceses. The opening of that letter is a masterpiece in itself:

My Lords,

I hear that you have fixed this month of September 1973 for the official launching of the new major seminary for West Cameroon. To my mind, this is an outstanding landmark in the history of the Church, in this part of the country. It is an event of such capital and primordial importance that it should be of deep and major concern to every Catholic worthy of the name in both your dioceses.

With that lofty opening, Professor Fonlon proceeded to suggest a curriculum for the education of the Cameroon priest. Such a scheme, he maintained, should ensure that “next to being a *saint*, our future African priest should be such a *scholar* that he should be respected by the world of learning, whether they like it or not”. The thrust of the *Open Letter* is an argument against the view that since the seminary is in Africa, it should produce simply a *cure de campagne*, a sort of rural parish priest.

The importance of the letter is mainly in this argument against any attempt to water down the traditional seminary curriculum and in the new elements that he suggested should be added to seminary studies in Cameroon. He insisted that the seminary should become a veritable university in which students should be trained in research methodology and rewarded with formal university degrees:

... the students, right from the very first year, should be drilled in scientific research and the methodical presentation of papers. In our days, no one gave a thought to this all-important aspect of scholarship . . . My firm conviction is that after three years of serious philosophical studies, a student who merits well should obtain a B.A. in Philosophy, and after his four years in Theology a Bachelor in Divinity.

A close observation of the study programme in the Major

Seminary at Bambui reveals that Professor Fonlon's views have been taken seriously and the products of that institution match those in respected Catholic seminaries the world over. Professor Fonlon's emphasis on the need for the Seminary to be affiliated to a well-established university abroad seems to have been respected, for the Seminary is affiliated to the Pontifical Urban University of Rome, and students who "merit well" normally obtain degrees under the aegis of that university. Professor Fonlon deserves credit for his proposals to the bishops, something that no other lay person in Cameroon had ever attempted in such concrete, formal and clear terms.

4 The Pedagogy of Bernard Fonlon Before we conclude this brief survey of Professor Fonlon's educational ideas, it is worthwhile to consider the method that he seems to have favoured for the implementation of those ideas - in a word, his pedagogy.

It has already been noted that Professor Fonlon was essentially a classical thinker in matters of education. Classicism, in this regard, can be defined simply as adherence to traditional standards. His classical orientation is evident in his admiration for classical curricula and for the writings of ancient Greek and Roman authors. He rarely spoke or wrote without quoting these sources.

In pedagogical terms, Professor Fonlon's educational ideas appear to fall within the context of what is called faculty psychology. Faculty psychology is a product of the eighteenth century and was first expounded by the German philosopher, Christian Von Wolff in 1734 (Zais, 1976:248). The theory holds that the mind can be considered as a unit consisting of separate powers or faculties, the most important of which are the intellect, feeling, will, perception, observation, memory

and reason. Each of these faculties, according to the theorists, resides in a specific area of the brain and can be strengthened through the process of formal or mental discipline, which consists of drills, memorization, the reading of classical authors and study of the “hard disciplines” as well as the classical languages. The theorists believe that once these subjects have been mastered, the mind is trained and the student prepared to handle or solve the various problems in life.

In Professor Fonlon’s educational writings, *drill*, the training of the *intellect* or the *mind*, as well as certain disciplines, is often emphasized as the best means to prepare students to become competent and useful. He considers learning to be for a general rather than a specific purpose. In other words, he believes that once the student’s faculties have been trained, that student is capable of solving many kinds of human and personal problems. For example, Professor Fonlon does not concentrate on the specific links between the university and society. As Professor Anomah Ngu puts it, a university has, among others, a duty to:

train people to perform a task or occupation in the society, and we may call this the occupational duty of the University.

Professor Ngu maintains that the university should be “directly concerned with the problems of the society, not in a theoretical manner, but in a real and practical way”. Van den Berghe (1973:1) similarly contends that “the nature of the University is incomprehensible without constant reference to the larger society”.

There is nevertheless a place in society for the idealist, and Professor Fonlon’s extreme admiration for the classical university tradition is always linked to his belief that the

university should be “dedicated to the common wealth”. Only history will show whether the societal or the classical approach proves to be the more beneficial for the university to which Bernard Fonlon was devoted.

5 Conclusion In this essay, an attempt has been made to highlight Professor Bernard Fonlon’s major educational ideas as revealed in his writings between 1964 and 1986. His ideas in the realm of education were conservative and traditional, and sometimes they were at odds with more radical planners. Nevertheless, Professor Fonlon enjoyed enormous respect from his contemporaries and students. To any critics in the academic world the words of a wise scientist are appropriate: Progress in the sciences is made when we seek to stand on the shoulders of giants rather than to tread on their toes.

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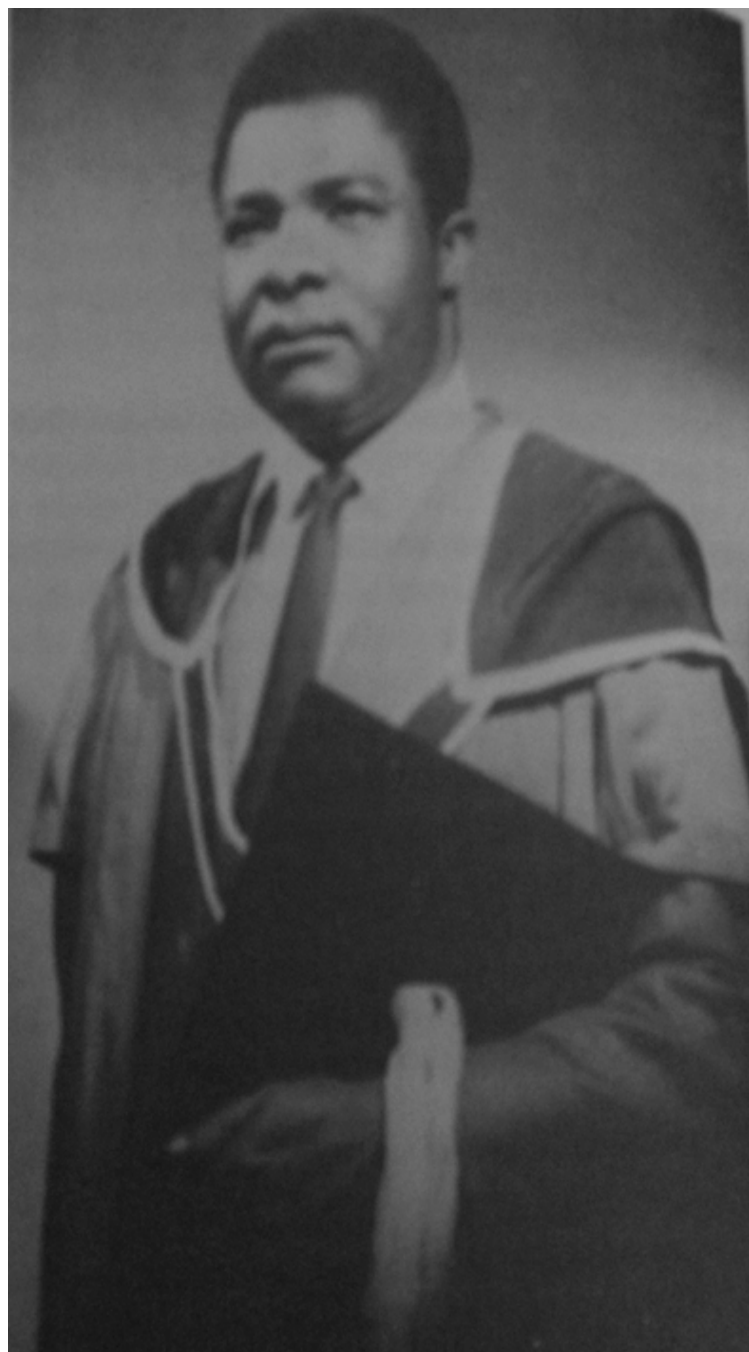
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Bernard N. Fonlon and the Black Diaspora

Edward O. Ake

To write about someone whose writings span the fields of literature, literary criticism, politics, philosophy, the philosophy of education, music and art, is certainly not an easy thing. It is possible, however, to venture into one or more of these disciplines, describing in some detail a particular area. What I propose to examine here, therefore, is Bernard Fonlon's interest in the black diaspora.¹

Professor Bernard Fonlon had a special affinity with the Blacks of the diaspora. This attachment was in a sense natural, since they were descendants of people from the African continent. In addition, many of them had succeeded in acquiring an education which enabled them to meditate on the plight of the Black person, and to suggest measures that could be taken to improve his lot. Some of these individuals, such as the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, the Trinidadian lawyer Sylvester Williams, the Haitian J.P. Mars, and the Afro-Americans W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and Paul Robeson, each in his own way did what he could to ameliorate the condition of the Black person.

Bernard Fonlon was basically a nationalist, but his was the kind of nationalism that went beyond the confines of the African continent. It was therefore only natural that he should feel a special attachment to the Blacks of the diaspora, since the impetus for the liberation of the African continent came from there. This is particularly true of W.E.B. Du Bois, who suggested that the League of Nations should adopt the idea of an international trusteeship for the former German

colonies. The hope was that the League would hold these territories in trust until they became self-governing entities.

As a former German colony, Cameroon therefore would have benefited from this idea of trusteeship, enunciated by Du Bois at the second Pan-African Conference, held at Versailles in 1919. Bernard Fonlon, the ardent nationalist, was not oblivious to this fact. In his essay on the death of W.E.B. Du Bois in 1963, "The Passing of a Great African",² he had this to say about the special meaning of Du Bois to Cameroonians. He wrote:

We in Cameroon have a special debt of gratitude to Du Bois, because it was he who originated the idea of international trusteeship, an idea that shaped the course of our history for forty years and without which it is doubtful whether Cameroon could have survived as a political entity. There was nothing to prevent the victorious allies from dismembering the conquered territories and integrating their share purely and simply into their adjacent colonies. But led by DuBois, the Pan-African Congress passed a resolution urging the allied powers to place the former German colonies under international supervision to be held in trust, for the inhabitants, as future self-governing territories.

1 What Kind of Leadership? After the emancipation of yesterday's slave, after the colonised African had thrown away the shackles of colonial rule, what kind of leadership would be required in these areas? These were problems that beset Bernard Fonlon, even as they had beset W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Bernard Fonlon believed in uncompromising truth, for to him therein lay the path to real, true freedom. What this meant was that one had to expose the enemy without, but also, and perhaps even more so, one had to point the finger at the enemy within. To hide our

weaknesses, to gloss over our imperfections these to him were simply other forms of enslavement, another colonialism. In his essay, "From Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois", an article which was erroneously perceived in some quarters as dealing with the Washington-Du Bois controversy, he argues that in the rape of the African continent, "le Blanc a pu faire ce qu'il a pu grace a la co-operation de l'homme noir" .³ In pointing out the direct involvement of Africans in their own demise, he posed the following rhetorical questions:

Qui encerclait les villages? Qui les mettait a feu et massacrait les vieillards, les infirmes? Le Noir ... Qui faisait la chasse a son frere? L'accablait d'affliction, de ruine, d'indignites, le vendait au Blanc?

It is true that most writers present the world from a particular vantage point and that their vision is part of their personality. However, occasionally this vision is distorted. Bernard Fonlon felt this way about the writers of the Negritude Movement, who dwelt on the evils of the White man, but refused to see the mote in their own eyes. He felt that such treachery was "trop grave pour etre psee sous silence par la poesie negro-africaine, surtout aujourd'hui ou l'amour de l'argent a plus de chance de pousser les hommes a trahir." He never held his tongue when faced with such situations, for he always felt that there cannot and should not be peace between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between justice and oppression, between freedom and tyranny. The conduct of yesterday's colonised, who today become the ally of external powers or the agent of neo-colonialism, deserve a dagger for a handshake. Du Bois for one reserved the same fate for yesterday's southern slave, today free, but who sits silent and wary, politic and sly, who

would flatter and be pleasant, who would endure petty insults with a smile - because he wants to derive some personal advantage.

2 Africa, the Diaspora and the Place of the Intellectual In the emergent African societies and in the Black communities of the diaspora, what place would the intellectual occupy? What would be the role of the scholar? Would he be a bystander who watches with a wry smile the comings and goings of men? Would he, like Chaucer's Clerk, be buried in his books and watch the world go to pieces? Or would he be in the vanguard of human society? Du Bois, for one, believed that all individuals did not possess the same abilities. To him, some were to know and others to dig, some had the talent of university men, and others that of the blacksmith.⁴ He was of the opinion that the Black race, like all other races, was generally saved by its exceptional men, what he called the Talented Tenth, in essence the scholars and intellectuals of the race.⁵

In this, Du Bois's idea of the scholar was not too different from that of his compatriot Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, in his oration "The American Scholar" (31 August, 1837), delivered to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, Massachussetts, argued that the scholar must cheer, raise and guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. He must be the world's heart and eye and must record heroic sentiments, noble biographies and melodious verse, and understand the conclusions of history. He adds that the scholar is that man "who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be a university of knowledges."⁶

Bernard Fonlon, like a Grand Old Man of Pan-Africanism, believed in the pre-eminent place of the

intellectual, of the thinker-scholar, in the emancipation of his people. He was of the opinion that the intellectual had the responsibility of thinking for the commonwealth. And like Du Bois in *The Crisis*, this man who in several ways was “a university of knowledges”, kept the pages of *Abbia*, the Cameroon cultural review, alive with insightful and provocative thoughts - some would say with iconoclastic views. If the plant sprouts from the ground, if the date-palm exists in the oasis in the desert, the Talented Tenth were produced by the university. Echoing Du Bois, he once wrote:

*I believe, firmly and truly, that the university is meant, not for the many, but for the few, not for the Talented Tenth?*⁷

3 Of Stamps and Men I began this essay by stating that Bernard Fonlon was, above all, a nationalist, a scholar-activist; that he saw the similarities between the roads that lay before yesterday's slave and the colonised of yesteryears; and that he was forever grateful to the Blacks of the diaspora for being the first to arouse the consciousness of Blacks everywhere and for being the first to raise their voices on behalf of African emancipation.

Though he had acknowledged his gratitude, through his writings and his research ~his Ph.D. thesis was on *La poesie et le reveil de l' homme noir*⁸, when he was Minister of Posts and Telecommunications in the late 1960s he decided to do it another way - by issuing stamps in their honour. In a radio interview which was later published in *Abbia*, he explained this move by saying that stamps were, above all, a means of expression. By honouring W.E.B. Du Bois, J.P. Mars, Marcus Garvey, Rene Maran, Langston Hughes and Aime Cesaire, his purpose was “rendre hommage a certains personnages dont la contribution a l'evolution de l'Histoire de l'Humanite a ete

particulièrement remarquable. C'est dans ce cadre que situe l'émission des timbres-poste sur les écrivains Noirs.,,9 In his view, these individuals could be regarded "comme les pionniers de la culture negre ... ils ont largement contribue a la prise de conscience de l'originalite de cette culture. Au stade actuel de l'épanouissement de la culture noir, il nous a semble juste de jeter les bases." Furthermore, he added that these individuals played a crucial role in the "émancipation des Noirs en Amérique, et, plus généralement, dans le monde."

In terms of his concerns, in terms of his awareness of the fact that what affects one Black person affects all Black people, that a Black person "battu précisément en tant que Noir - c'est leur frère qui est battu, voire, c'est chacun d'eux qu'est battu; que la lutte pour le libérer, c'est leur lutte à eux, et future tant qu'il restera un seul Noir asservi, personne ne sera libre," ¹ he was simply echoing the inner thoughts of that Harlem poet he met in Uganda in 1962 during the African writers' conference.¹⁰ Langston Hughes, in his poem "Brother" wrote:

*We're related - you and I,
You from the West Indies,
I from Kentucky,
Kinsmen - you and I, You from Africa
I from the U.S.A.*

*Brothers - you and I*¹²

Notes

1 In several ways, Bernard N. Fonlon fostered my interest in Afro-American studies. In August, 1976, when I was preparing to travel to the United States to take a Master's degree at Atlanta University, Georgia, he gave me a note:

18th August 1976.

To whom it may concern

I, Bernard Fonlon, M.A., Ph.D., Dip.Ed., Head of the Department of African Literature, in the University of Yaounde, do hereby testify as follows:

-that courses in American Negro Literature constitute a substantial part of the studies done in my department

-that there is a dearth of qualified teachers in the said department in the field of American Negro Literature

- that Mr. Ako, a former student of mine, will be an asset to the department if he specialises to the highest level possible in Negro American Literature.

Dr. Bernard FONLON.

2 It is interesting to note that on the death of Bernard Fonlon, I wrote a piece in the *Cameroon Tribune* which I deliberately entitled "Bernard N. Fonlon: the Passing of a Great African." This was meant to echo his tribute to Dr Du Bois entitled "The Passing of a Great African" in *Black Titan: W.E.B. Du Bois*, ed. John Henrik Clarke *et al.* Boston: Beacon

Press, 1970, pp. 213-25.

3 Bernard Fonlon, "From Booker T. Washington to W.E.B. Du Bois", *Melanges Africains*, ed. Thomas Melone. Yaounde: Editions Pedagogiques Afrique-contact, p. 242.

4 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* in *Three Negro Classics* ed. John Hope Franklin. New York: Avon Books, 1965, p.268.

5 Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 81.

6 George B. de Huszar, ed., *The Intellectuals: A Controversial Portrait*. Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960, p. 137.

7 Bernard Fonlon, *Abbia*, June 1979, 34-35-36-37, p. 53.

8 This thesis was published in 1979 by the Presse Universitaire du Zaïre, with an introduction by Lilyan Kesteloot. Dr Fonlon indicated that he had given the manuscript to a Belgian who thought it could be published. Dr Fonlon, however, did not hear anything from the publisher. The next he knew was that the book was out and in libraries around the world. He contacted the publishers and even tried to have the issue handled by the Cameroon Embassy in Kinshasa. None of these efforts bore fruit. Had this thesis been published shortly after he received his Ph.D. in 1961, it would have had as much of an impact as Lilyan Kesteloot's *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature*. There is no copy of Dr Fonlon's book in the University of Yaoundé library.

9 Bernard Fonlon, "Le Cameroun honore les ecrivains noirs", *Abbia* 23, Sept.-Dec. 1969, p. 142.

10 *Melanges Africains*, p. 255.

11 Apart from Langston Hughes, other people from the diaspora who were present at the conference included Saunders Redding, also from the United States, Arthur Drayton from Trinidad and

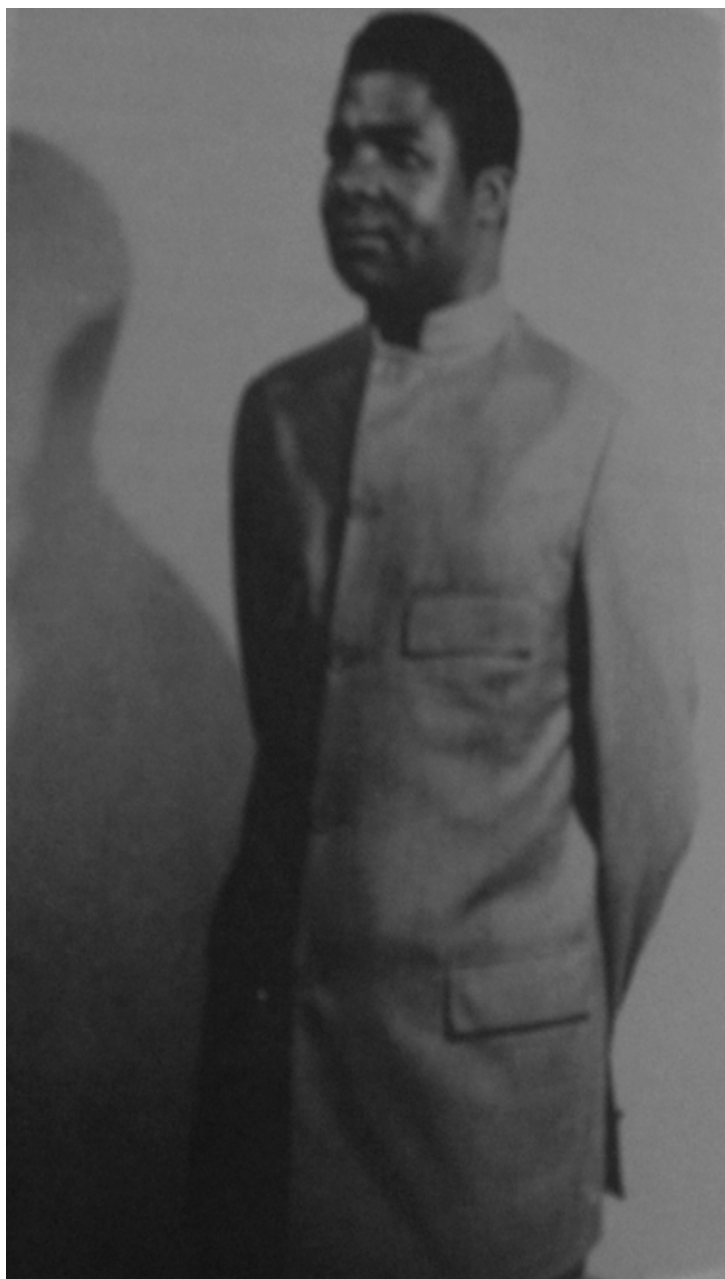
Barry Reckord from Jamaica.

12 Langston Hughes, *Selected Poems*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 265-66.

Footnote: Some of the pieces in *Abbia* which concerned the Black diaspora, apart from Professor Fonlon's tribute to Du Bois, were Engelbert Mveng, "Signification du Premier Festival Mondial des Atrés Nègres", Nos. 12-13, 1966, pp.7-12; Bernard Fonlon, "Le Cameroun honore les ecrivains noirs", No. 23, 1969, pp.142-48; Amy Jacques Garvey, "Marcus Mosiah Garvey - The Man (1887-1940)", No. 25, 1971, pp. 81-86; and Langston Hughes, "Why you reckon?", "A good job done", "Father and Son" and "Cora Unashamed" (short stories), Nos. 34-35-36-37, June 1979, pp. 451-96. These were among the stories Dr Fonlon selected to illustrate the nature of the short story. Other stories he chose were by Pushkin, Merimee, Daudet, Frank O'Connor and Tennyson.

Finally, significantly enough, the last time I saw Bernard Fonlon alive was at Yaounde Airport in April, 1986, when we went to see off a young Afro-American lady, Dr Angelita Diane Reyes of Pennsylvania State University, who came to

Cameroon for a fortnight as part of the Yaounde-Penn exchange program.



Bernard Fonlon and Ireland

Loreto Todd

1 Background I first met Doctor Bernard Fonlon in Buea in 1967. He and I both happened to be visiting a Djottin friend at the same time. The meeting was brief since Doctor Fonlon was on ministerial business in the area. A few months later, I was at Mass in Yaounde Cathedral when a voice behind me said: “You’ve got an English missal. Do you mind if I borrow it for a moment?” Turning round, I recognised Doctor Fonlon and he also recognised me. “Aren’t you the Irish girl I met in Angela’s?” That was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Doctor Fonlon’s untimely death. It was a friendship which taught me a great deal about kindness, generosity, happiness, literature, patriotism and the pursuit of truth, because these were the topics of the many conversations we shared. In everything he said and did, Doctor Fonlon revealed himself to be a truly great and good human being. Writing in another context, the poet Wordsworth aptly sums up the feelings of loss shared by all who knew him:

there hath passed away a glory from the earth¹

2 Bernard Fonlon in Ireland In 1954, Bernard Fonlon left the Seminary in Nigeria and found himself, at thirty, a highly educated man without qualifications. He could read and write French; felt equally at home with the Classical Latin of Virgil and the Liturgical Latin of the Vulgate; knew more poetry than the average university don; was a good mathematician, a reasonable cook and an excellent musician. The Seminary had trained him well but had not worried about such secular

preoccupations as “A” levels or other academic qualifications. Nevertheless, one of the seminary teachers, Father J. O’Neill (who, coincidentally came from my village in Northern Ireland), managed to get him accepted for a B.A. degree in the University of Cork, in Ireland.

From the moment of acceptance by Cork, his academic record reads like fiction. Within three years, he had been awarded a B.A. degree with Honours and on the very day that his first degree was awarded, he paid ten pounds sterling (a princely sum in those days) to register for an M.A. Already aware that the future of Cameroon lay in reunification, Bernard Fonlon elected to specialise in French and selected as his M.A. topic *Flaubert Ecrivain*. This degree was awarded with First-Class Honours and in the minimum period possible. Only one further degree awaited and for that he registered on the same day that he received his M.A. certificate. The doctoral thesis was to be central to his future research. It was entitled *La Poesie et Le Reveil de l’ Homme Noir*.

While researching for this degree, Bernard Fonlon managed to do part-time what others fail to achieve full-time. He read for a Diploma in Education in Oxford and spent a year as an occasional student of the Sorbonne. Less than ten years after the young man without qualifications left Nigeria for Ireland, he returned to Cameroon with three degrees, two diplomas and a wealth of knowledge which he put at the service of his country.

3 The Influence of Ireland One’s university is often called one’s *Alma Mater* (Sweet Mother) and the university of Cork proved an intellectual mother to Bernard Fonlon. He already knew Irish teachers before travelling to Cork because many of the Holy Ghost Fathers who trained him in the Seminary were from Ireland. At university, he studied not just English

and French Literature but the Literature in English of Irish writers. He read poets like James Clarence Mangan who, in the 1840s could not write openly about his motherland but described Ireland as a beautiful woman, *Dark Rosaleen*, and foresaw the bloodshed that was inevitable in the struggle for independence:

*O! the Erne shall run red With redundance of blood.
The earth shall rock beneath our tread, And flames wrap hill and
wood.*

*And gun-peal and slogan cry,
Wake many a glen serene,
Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die, My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!*

*The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,
My dark Rosaleen.²*

He studied writers like William Butler Yeats, whose play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on Ireland's sufferings had such an effect on its audiences that, in his old age, Yeats asked:

*Did that play of mine send out
Certain men the English shot?³*

And he had a particular fondness for the idealistic poet, Padraic Pearse, who dreamed of a Celtic Ireland, free of oppression, and who was shot as a traitor after the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916. Writers like these reminded him of the young Black writers also struggling for freedom and for their own voice. It is no surprise that the first chapter of Bernard Fonlon's Ph.D. *La Poesie et Le Revell de l' Homme Noir*

is devoted to Irish writers whose themes and aspirations are echoed in the writings of all who wish to be judged on their merits and not on the colour of their skin or the exotic quality of their language.

4 Cameroon and Ireland There are a number of similarities between the history of Cameroon and that of Ireland, similarities which allowed Bernard Fonlon to feel a kinship with the country of his higher education. Both countries had, before colonisation, a system of government based on chieftains who drew their power from the people, held the land on behalf of their people and who did not necessarily pass on their position to a first son. Elders of the tribe were involved in the selection of a new chief because the choice fundamentally affected the lives of all the people. Once, when we discussed tribal government, Dr Fonlon said:

But you know, it's just like Nso. I had no trouble understanding your chiefs and your poets.

Both countries had rich indigenous cultures and in both countries a non-standard variety of English arose. It was called ~ “Pidgin” in one and a “Dialect” in the other but, in both cases, it was an attempt by the indigenous people to recreate the nuances of the mother tongue in a language that was not native to the country but was the language of education and advancement. Often, the Irish have been accused of using the name of God too frequently, but in Irish, the normal greetings were:

Dia duit! (May God be with you!)

Bail 0 Dbia ar an obair! (God prosper the work!)

Beannuigh Dia ort! (God bless you!)

“God” was in the mouth of the speaker in joy, in suffering, a birth and in death. No wonder that His name comes through in the speech of the people and their literature. Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage*, for example, opens with:

Meg: *Thank God, that’s over.*

(From the end of the passage comes the blast of an off-key bagpiper.)

In the name of God, what’s that?

and at line 12 of Sean O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock*, the following exchange occurs:

Johnny: *Oh quit that readin’ for God’s sake! Are yous losin’ all your feelin’s? It’ll soon be none of you’ I read anythin’, that’s not about butcherin’.*

Mary: *He’s gettin’ very sensitive, all of a sudden.*

Mrs Boyle: *I’ll read it myself, Mary, by an’ by, when I come home. Everyone’s sayin’ that he was a Diehard - thanks be to God that Johnny had nothin’ to do with him this long time.*

5 The English Language in Ireland To those who do not know the Irish language (Gaelic), the variety of English spoken and written by the original native population is “bad English” or “dialect English”. To many Irish people, it is now referred to as “Hiberno-English” and it is certainly different from any other form of English in the world. To those who know the Irish language, however, Hiberno-English can be shown to be Irish in a new dress. The people only *seemed* to give up their language. In fact they transmuted it, using English words and structures to recreate the idiom of their Irish mother tongue. Three brief examples will illustrate this.

First, Irish distinguished between *you* singular and *you*

plural.

Indeed, it is the only Indo-European language that invariably used one form “tu” for the singular and a different form “sibh” for the plural”:

An bhfuil tu ag dul? (Are you singular going?) *An bhfuil sibh ag dul?* (Are you plural going?)

Irish speakers naturally carried over this distinction into English, analogising from “pen” = one pen, “pens” = more than one pen, to “you” = one person, “yous” = more than one person.

Secondly, Irish distinguished between an action which had been performed some time ago and one which had just recently been performed, making a distinction that is similar to Pidgin’s:

Dem bin go.

and:

Dem don go.

In Irish, a word equivalent to “after” was used to suggest the recent past.

Ta me indhiaidh sin a dheanamh.

means “I have just done that” but is the literal equivalent of “I am after doing that”. This feature is common in speech and in literature. In 1.6 of J.M. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea*, for example,

Nora says:

The young priest is after bringing them.

implying that he has just this minute brought them.

Thirdly, Irish idioms have been translated into English so that, although the words are English, the attitudes expressed are Irish. A stupid person is described as being:

as fat in the forehead as a hen

an ugly person has:

a face that would turn milk (i.e. make it go bad)

a small child who can walk well is said to be:

as steady on his legs⁵ as a three-legged pot

a generous person would:

give you the bite out of his mouth

and a sharp-tongued person has:

a tongue that would shave a mouse.

Irish proverbs frequently differ from English ones in that they usually have a twist in them.

There's a truth in the last drop in the bottle

for example, does not mean "In vino veritas". Rather it means:

You will hear things from a person who is drunk but is it the truth you hear or what he thinks is the truth?

Another example is:

They're lifeless that's faultless which means:

Only the dead are free from sin.

In early writings by Irish people, the English adopted was close to the standard language, but in the twentieth century, with the growth of an independence movement, many native Irish writers stopped modelling themselves on writers from

England or America. James Joyce expressed the views of many when he caused his alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, to say:

*This race and this country and this life produced me... I shall express myself as lam.*⁶

Some writers went further and did for Irish what Gabriel Okara attempted for Ijaw in *The Voice*: they attempted to recreate in English the rhythms, idioms and structures of Irish. Perhaps the clearest example of this can be found in Flann O'Brien's⁷ novel, *The Poor Mouth* (1964) which was originally written in Irish in 1942 and which begins as follows:

I am noting down the matters which are in this document because the next life is approaching me swiftly - far from us be the evil thing and may the bad spirit not regard me as a brother! - and also because our likes will never be there⁸ again. It is right and fitting that some testimony of the diversions and adventures of our times should be provided for those who succeed us because our types will never be there again nor any other life in Ireland comparable to ours who exist no longer.

O' Coonassa is my surname in Gaelic, my first name is Bonaparte and Ireland is my little native land. I cannot truly remember either the day I was born or the first six months I spent here in the world. Doubtless, however, I was alive at that time although I have no memory of it, because I should not exist now if I were not there then and to the human being, as well as to every other living creature, sense comes gradually.

Still more recent writers, such as Brian Friel, have tried to represent both Irish and English through the medium of English. This resembles the task faced by Chinua Achebe in such a novel as *Arrow of God* when English is used to

represent both Igbo and English. Friel tackles the problem most obviously in his play *Translations* which is set in County Donegal in the 1840s, a period when English was gradually ousting the indigenous language. Friel's intention was to utilise Hiberno-English and he was critical of other Irish writers who:

... pitched their voice for English acceptance ... I think that for the first time this is stopping, that there is some kind of confidence, some kind of coming together of Irish dramatists who are not concerned with this ... we are talking to ourselves as we must and if we are overheard in America, or England, so much the better!.

Today, more than at any time in the past, Irish writers are prepared to use the entire spectrum of Englishes in Ireland, the standard, the non-standard and the Irish-influenced Hiberno-English in order to represent more accurately the thoughts, ideals and aspirations of the people. It used to be said of Ireland that it was a country where the living emigrate and the dead live on. To some extent, this was and is true, but, if we judge by the literature that is currently being produced, there is a new self-awareness and self-confidence in Ireland that will cause the living to stay where they are, finding fulfilment in the future as well as the past.

6 Bernard Fonlon's attitude to Ireland Ben and I frequently discussed Irish literature and Ireland. He told me about his first days in Cork, about the loneliness he experienced in a country that was so far from home and about his gradual acculturation to the place and the people. He loved the music and the freshness of the Irish ballad traditions. Frequently, he would ask me to write out the words of a song so that he could memorise them. Then on

my next visit, he would treat me to a Cameroonised version of an Irish melody. Ireland meant a lot ot Doctor Fonlon. He understood its people and their aspirations; he shared their love of music and poetry; perhaps most of all, he responded to their warmth.

The last time I saw Ben was when he took me to Yaounde airport.

He was wearing an Aran sweater that I had bought on the West Coast of Ireland for him. Neither of us could have known we were saying not just *au revoir* but *adieu*. Ireland helped a little to mould this man. If all that we see and do can become a part of us, then part of Ireland is also buried behind the Cathedral in Kumbo.

Notes

1 The quotation is from William Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, 1.18. In context, it appears as follows:

*The rainbow comes and goes, And lovely is the rose,
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth; But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth.*

2 According to local tradition, St Patrick, who converted the Irish to Christianity, could not bear to think that his beloved Ireland would be destroyed by fire on the Last Day so he begged God to spare it. Eventually God agreed that Ireland would not be destroyed with fire and brimstone but would sink beneath the sea seven years before the end of the world. In this verse, Mangan is reminding Dark Rosaleen that she will not die until the end of the world is near.

3 The quotation is from *The Man and the Echo*, lines 11-12. In context, it appears as follows:

*In a cleft that's christened Alt
Under broken stone I halt
At the bottom of a pit
That broad noon has never lit,
And shout a secret to the stone.*

*All that I have said and done,
 Now that I am old and ill,
 Turns into a question till
 I lie awake night after night
 And never get the answers right.
 Did that play of mine send out
 Certain men the English shot?*

4 French, for example, has two forms “tu” and “vous” but “vous” can be used as a singular of respect or distance:

Qu’ est-ce que vous avez, monsieur?

Irish differs from other Indo-European languages in many ways. For example, it does not have a word for “Mr” or “Mrs” or “Miss”, social stratification being unmarked in the language. Neither does it differentiate between “man” and “husband” or “woman” and “wife”:

English French Irish *man homme fear husband mari fear
 woman femme bean wife femme bean.*

5 Irish, like many African languages, did not differentiate between “foot” and “leg” (both were comprehended by “cos”) or between “hand” or “arm” (both of which were comprehended by “lamh”). Irish speakers could, of course, make minute distinctions if and when they were required. To give just one example, for the one English verb KNOW, Irish had three structures because distinctions were made on whether the knowledge related to a person:

Td aithne agam ar Mhdire. (I know Mary.)

to a verifiable fact:

Ta eolas agam ar stair. (I know history)

or to general information:

Td fios agam. (I know.)

6 The quotation is from *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (penguin Books, 1969, p.202).

7 Flann O' Brien was a pseudonym of Brian O'Nolan, who also wrote under the names Myles na Gopaleen, George Knowall and John James Doe. He was a native speaker of Irish (Gaelic or Gaedhilige, being the name of the language in Irish).

8 Many traditional Irish storytellers or Seannachaidhe feel that the old ways are dying out and when their generation goes, so will the knowledge of past wisdom.

9 Quoted from Vlf Dantanus, *Brian Friel: The Growth of an Irish Dramatist* (Sweden, 1985).

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Dr Bernard Fonlon and Nso Tradition

Shay Philip Nsai and Faay Daniel Noni Lantum

Professor Bernard Nsokika Fonlon was not brought up in the fertile depths of Nso animist culture and traditions, because of his early side-tracking into the Catholic Church and calling to the priesthood. However, when he was laicized he needed to be inculturated in order that he might regain his traditional rights and assume his due share of responsibilities in Nso customary politics. Hence with time and his re-education as a Nso citizen, Nsokika was initiated into some cultural societies and thus elevated to the ranks of authority - actions which conferred upon him the socio-political status compatible with that which the Cameroon State and society had already conferred on him.

According to Nso custom, the principal determinants of one's social status are sex, age, rights of one's lineage, birthright, prowess and distinction in some field of art, culture or warfare. Thus as an adult, Nsokika was initiated into the *Manjong* society called *Mfuh*; as a member of the *Wonle Nto* group he had to see Ngwerong; as a powerful political figure, especially one who played a very significant role in the gigantic Kumbo Water Scheme among other things, he became a Shufai-wu-Ntu-Ndzev. (These societies and their functions will become clear later.) In order to consolidate his new title as Shufai, he had to go for sacrifices and blessings in his maternal grandmother's lineage (*Kitaayiy*), from where his kinsmen led him to perform the official salutation of the Fon of Nso. This event is called *Kimbun-Fon*. In the public performance of his duties in the paramount "fondom" of N so, he received blessings and the special title of "Mkong-Metoh" from the Fon of Oku.

This article describes these customary events as Bernard N sokika participated in them and attempts to highlight Professor Fonlon's personality as a Traditional Nso man. This paper will be presented under the following subheadings: roots and hereditary rights; early education; arrival at manhood; elevation to the ranks of the nobility; decorations for valour and merit; funeral rites; ancestor's status; and conclusion.

1 Roots, Hereditary Rights and Privileges Professor Bernard Nsokika Fonlon was, on his paternal side, son of Joseph Fonlon, who was one of the sons of Shwaaiy wu Banten, a village in Nso land, Bui division. As the sons of this village were all of *Wonle Ntoh* (or *Nchelavsi* or Retainers), one of the three principal socio-anthropological groups of Nso (the others being *Dui* and *Mtar Nsob*), Nsokika Fonlon inherited the traditional rights and privileges of this group. Hence he could enrol into the Ngwerong society - known as *Knifon* in other Bamenda grassfield "fondoms" _ which plays the important role of policing and maintaining law and order; and thus he could participate in the funerals of their members and of the top nobility.

Indeed, his father Joseph Fonlon had served in his youth as a retainer, living in Ngwerong concession and keeping watch. During this time he was drilled in the instruments of the classical Ngwerong orchestra and was groomed in the secret informal school of the palace, *Ntoh*. After his release, Joseph Fonlon settled near the Faanjang compound whose lineage head is Head of the "Seven Atarntoh" (Fathers of the Palace), who are the executive of the Ngwerong society. From here he was available for the Fon's errands, as this

compound is situated about half a kilometre from the *Ntoh Nso*, the Fon's palace. It is here that Nsokika was born on 19 November, 1924. For his occupation, Papa Joseph Fonlon was a gardener for the Catholic Missionaries at Shisong until 1928.

In 1929 he got a new job with Dr Dalrymple and worked for the Government Hospital which was opened at Nkavikeng that year and was the forerunner of the present Bango Baptist Hospital. Thus this association with English-speaking Europeans gave Papa Fonlon a working knowledge of English. His son Nsokika also picked up some English, since the family were living on the Medical Officer's premises.

From his maternal line, Nsokika was the only son and second child of Agatha Naa, who was of Boh lineage in Dzeng village. She was the daughter of Ngwaang Ngafin, the Mfuh executive member and hunter, and Yesum Kibver-wu-Jem, who was of the Jem lineage in Kumbo town. As one's mother's home is very important in one's life, as the alternative in case one's paternal home becomes hostile, Nso children always keep in touch with their mother's lineage. Besides, Nso tradition lays it down as a rule of procedure in the long process of consolidating the authority of Nso nobility that, after nomination by the Fon of Nso to the rank of a noble, the candidate must report first to his mother's lineage (*Kitaayiyi*), where he is received and blessed, before he can perform the traditional ceremony of *Kimbunfon*, saluting the Fon. During the *Kimbunfon*, the candidate or designated noble is accompanied by members of his maternal and paternal lineages and, of course, crowds of kinsmen and friends from everywhere, who jointly present him to the Fon, and he greets the Fon for the first time in his new capacity as

a noble. We will see how Bernard Fonlon performed the *Kitaayiy* and *Kimbun fon* ceremonies in later sections of this paper.

2 Early Education According to the official records of the Native Authority School of Bamfem quarters in Kumbo town, Bernard Nsokika and Joseph Lafon, now Faay Liwong, were enrolled in that school on 5 January, 1931, by Mr Henry Tankoh, who was the first Headmaster. Mr Tankoh had been trained at the Buea Teachers' Training School. There were only 16 pupils on that day but 19 more were expected to complete a full class of 35. The school fee for each pupil was three pence.

As the main language of instruction was English, Bernard Nsokika had the edge over his classmates, having picked up some English by association with the English-speaking medical family at his father's workplace. Since their teacher was not Lamnso-speaking, being of Bali Nyongha and speaking only English and Mungaaka, there was some initial communication problem. So, contemporaries remember, young Bernard Nsokika became very helpful by occasionally interpreting ideas and words for his mates and even for his teacher.

Unfortunately, due to Tankoh's severity to the pupils and even to his wife (a severity intolerable in Nso culture), the Fon of Nso, Ngah Bifon I, summoned him and called him to order. The Fon declared him a bad example and requested the administration for a replacement forthwith. The District Officer accepted the request and ordered that Mr Tankoh hand over the school to the Fon of Nso and quit. Thus the school was temporarily closed, pending the posting of another teacher. Mr Clement Ndonga, who arrived in Kumbo on 13 September, 1931, reported to the Fon promptly on the

same day, and was handed the keys and school equipment.

The school reopened the next day with 27 children on the roll under the watchful eye of Fon Ngah Bifon I himself. Among the schoolmates of Nsokika in 1931 were: Willibrord Shasha oj Faanjang, Chrysanthus Yange of Ndze-ndzev wu ku-un, Stepher Shafe wu Tabuiy, Boniface Yufenyuy wu Banka (wan Tanchiylav) Ignatius Lon wu Tashitiy, Joseph Noni Lafon (now Faay Liwong) Pius Lailam wu Tankumtsen, Joseph Nsamelu wu Mbingiy William Tar wu Faanjang, Anthony Wirba and Christopher Fonyt Nga. Mr Aloys Balon Wankuy joined the school as a second teacher on 16 January, 1932. Also in 1932, a young Polish priest called Francis Figl arrived in Shisong parish. On learning that the children of Catholic parents were attending a non-Catholic school, he persuaded the parents to withdraw their children and transfer them to the Catholic Mission school in Shisong. So Nsokika and many of his mates were transferred at the end of the first term to the Sacred Heart School, Shisong, where they continued their elementary education as far as Standard IV, which was then the highest class in Shisong. In his booklet *To Every Son of Nso*, Dr Bernard Fonlon writes that Mr Lainjo was his teacher in Class II in 1932. Nsokika completed Standard IV in 1936 and then went over to St Anthony's School, Njinikom, to complete Standards V and VI in 1937 and 1938.

Between 1939 and 1941, Nsokika became a teacher at the Shisong Catholic School. He taught the late Sylvester Kindzeka Kilo in Infants One and Two in 1939 and 1940, and taught the late Boniface Sakah in Standard III in 1941. But being an aspirant to the Sacred Priesthood, a fire that had been enkindled in his mind at Njinikom, Nsokika was assigned to teach catechism on a part-time basis at Kikai-kelaki, about nine kilometres north of Kumbo and 12

kilometres from his Shisong school base.

It is important to observe here that Nsokika's early enrolment as a school pupil, his father's privileged occupation as a gardener for a medical doctor, his father's and mother's recent conversion to the Catholic faith and their dedication to the Christian community, which was essentially on the defensive at that time - all these prevented him from being recruited as one of the Ngwerong pages as his father had been, to live in the Ngwerong enclosure and be raised in the informal schooling and socialization system of the typical *Nchelar*. Furthermore, the sowing of the sacerdotal seed in his mind at the age of 13 years and the attendant call to special discipline, particularly the avoidance of participation in customary and traditional activities - which were all branded as pagan and devilish by the foreign Catholic priests - put him in a class of his own, characterized by exclusion from the mainstream of Nso social and cultural life. In a sense, Nsokika was a stranger in his own milieu, as all seminarians usually are. In 1942 he left Nsoland in the company of the late Maurice Mbu Bayena to study at Christ the King's College cum Minor Seminary at Onitsha in Nigeria. There he remained till 1946, when he passed his Senior Cambridge School Certificate with exemption from London Matriculation.

3 Arrival at Manhood Unfortunately for Bernard Nsokika, his priestly career was thwarted in 1953, and from that date onwards he began to seek to adapt to normal civil society. After his long years of university education abroad, he returned to Cameroon in 1961. Fortunately for him, he found favour with the powers that be, particularly Alhadji Ahmadou Ahidjo, First President of the Cameroon Republic (1960-1982). At that time, politicians were handpicked rather than

voted for through a democratic process. So Dr Fonlon found himself propelled rather rapidly through various high political and administrative positions between 1962 and 1971: *Charge de Missions* at the Presidency, Member of Parliament, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications and Minister of Public Health.

Although the national territory was his constituency by virtue of these high positions, he was reminded that his place of birth was his natural constituency, for which he was expected to play the role of spokesman between the Bui people and the national authorities. How can one be spokesman for a people from whom one has been alienated and whose culture one has not mastered? This was the challenge for Dr Bernard Nsokika Fonlon - the challenge to inculturate his Europeanism and Christianity, the challenge to become a true man of Nso again in order to fully appreciate the Bui people and their aspirations, weaknesses and strengths. Nsokika began to search for his roots.

The cultural institution which proclaims that a boy has now become an adult is the *Manjong*, the collective name which refers to adult males who are potential warriors. Within the Manjong, there are several societies which, though they bear the general characteristics of Manjong, have in their initiation processes certain peculiarities such as music style, motive of existence, degree of secrecy, territory for recruitment of adherents, and the grade of military authority conferred upon them by the Fon of Nso. These societies are *Mfuh*, *Djwim*, *Kwebiri* and *Samba*. The Mfuh society ranks supreme among these, and in spite of their enrolling into the others, all Nso adults are expected to enrol in the Mfuh society.

When a citizen has enrolled, he is expected in his turn to foot the “celebration” of one of the weekly sessions. But his

first celebration is the historic one called *Kimfum Ke Mfuh* or simply *Fum Mfuh*. As the grandeur is measured in terms of the goods delivered by the incumbent for the purpose of the feast, the executive group usually prescribes and demands of him goods according to his visible wealth, social position and popularity. Dr Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, the Shufai-wu- Ntu-Ndzev, then Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications, was called upon by his people of Nso in 1968 to perform the *Kimfum ke Mfuh* and thereby join the Nso cultural military ranks.

He provided a keg of gunpowder, two adult cows, 250 calabashes of palm-wine, 12 goats, several fowls and several baskets of fufu corn. Because of his distinguished position, these goods were divided between the *Mfuh Gham* and the *Mfuh Bab*, although Dr Fonlon belonged to the Mfuh Gham as his parents' compound is situated in the northern part of Kumbo. His father, Papa Joseph Fonlon, was a member of the Mfuh Gham and held a position in the ranks of the internal cult of heroes, *Kighaa-Ke-Mfuh*. He was a red-feathered hero, having distinguished himself by his bravery during the Fon's annual hunting expeditions at Mbokam and Wahsi. Dr Fonlon's Fum Mfuh celebrations were extremely grand, and the occasion is still well remembered as a record-breaking event. As would be expected, Dr Fonlon himself was not present in Kumbo to join in the dancing, eating and heavy drinking. Papa Fonlon thanked the society very warmly for initiating Dr Fonlon as his eventual successor in the ranks of the Mfuh society.

4 Dr Fonlon's Important Contributions to Bui Division

Although the National Government generally has a development plan for all its provinces and divisions, the population in each area is usually very sensitive to the

particular effort made by its delegates and representatives to bring this plan to fruition in its own area. The Bui people in general and the Kumbo people in particular have been very grateful to Dr Fonlon, who, as Minister in the Government, took the initiative and mobilized the people, with the co-operation of the Senior Divisional Officer for Bui (then Mr Nicholas Ade Ngwa) and the Fon of Nso, to build the Post Office at Tobin. The Head of State rewarded the communal effort of the Bui people by up-grading it to a Second Class Post Office, a grade reserved for big provincial towns because of its many amenities.

The second development project was St Augustine's College.

For that Dr Fonlon requested the technical assistance of the Canadian Government through the Cameroonian authorities, and the request was granted. The excellent Science laboratories at St Augustine's College were the result of that intervention, and it is those laboratories that caused the College to be accorded the status of a High School for Science.

As Bansa is on the high mountains of the Adamawa range, good springs are only seasonal. So the Kumbo town population often had serious water shortage problems during the dry season. Sensitive to this acute need, Dr Fonlon had studies conducted for the provision of a modern pipe-borne all-season water system for the approximately 30,000 people living in the Kumbo Town area. It is thanks to the Public Works Department of the Cameroon Government that the studies were completed in record time, and the Cameroon authorities could place a firm and justifiable request to the Canadian Government for the Kumbo Water Scheme. The project having been viewed favourably, Dr Fonlon requested the local traditional administrative authorities to mobilize the

population to make their contribution by vacating the area above the water source and by constructing trenches for the giant pipes. This was one of the most elaborate community development projects (outside the Christian missions) that the Bui people have ever achieved.

During the commissioning of the Kumbo Water Project by the then Minister of Mines and Energy, Mr Henry Namata Elangwe, in *Ntob Nso*, several national decorations were awarded. Most spectacular was the elevation of Dr Bernard Fonlon to the rank of a *Kibai*, the traditional administrative rank next to that of *a-F on*. The new title awarded him by dint of this rank and office was “Shufai-wu-Ntu-Ndzev”, meaning the Lord of the Water Sources. In addition to the title, Dr Fonlon was adorned in public with the official robes and decorations of a distinguished Nso Lord. The Fon of Nso was in attendance giving orders and the Shufai-wu-Ndze-Ndzev put the dress items on the new Shufai-wu- Ntu-Ndzev.

Dr Fonlon was first “arrested” by the “blinded Ngwerong”, according to custom, and then taken to the Ngwerong enclosure and shown the secret places of Ngwerong. Then they brought him out and took him before the Fon of Nso and the huge crowd that had come to witness the commissioning of the Water Project. Then they took off his cap and shirt and then dressed him in the royal gown made out of the royal cloth, *Ndey-Njav*. A royal cap, *Futcheb*, was pressed on his head. A royal cutlass in its scabbard, *Shwahmbam*, with royal cloth was hung over his shoulder, and he was then given the staff of office, *Kitumi*. It must be observed that it is not usual to adorn one nobleman with so many decorations on the same occasion, for each piece is a distinctive honour in its own right, and nobles normally work hard to merit each of them. Very few Nso Lords have all that

Dr Fonlon received on that day. This only proves the worth of his achievement and the depth of gratitude and esteem that the Nso people reserved for Dr Fonlon.

And the decorations were not all. Certain rights and privileges went with the status of “Shufai”. He was now a protected person and no one below the rank of Shufai could shake hands with him. Instead, they would have to cup their hands and greet him with a nod and repeat, “Ndzee-na”. In his turn, the Shufai has to clap and cup his hands when greeting the Fon of Nso or other a-fons, saying either “Nyaar” or “Nsoon”, and completing the greeting with a gentle bow of reverence. During Nso “State” events, when the nobles have to take their places according to protocol, the Shufais sit next to the a-fon; then the Fais follow; next come the a-sheys; and finally the rest of the population.

By virtue of the Shufai status, the incumbent merits special funeral rites and celebrations, attended by the Mfuh and N gwerong masked jujus for entertainment. Moreover, the Shufai position is hereditary, that is, the title can be passed down from father to son in successive generations. In effect, when a young Shufai is appointed, as in Dr Fonlon’s case, he is usually given several wives by his senior colleagues, and he founds a lineage of which he is the head. When he dies, he becomes an “ancestor” and his successors have to invoke him on special occasions during traditional prayers of atonement or of request for gifts, especially the gift of fertility. But here Dr Fonlon was in a labyrinth! He never asked for such honours, rights and privileges. He was a sworn celibate, a Christian to the core and even a Catholic priest at heart. He left no biological sons to succeed him as lineage head.

5 Kitaayiy When someone is appointed to the post of Shufai

or Fai, he does not take up the office immediately. According to Nso custom, the candidate takes the news to his maternal grandfather. There, the honour is received, sacrifices are offered to the ancestors of that lineage, and the award is blessed. Then it is given back to the candidate. This ceremony is called *Kitaayiy*. Arrangements are then made for this maternal lineage to come out in their numbers and join the father's lineage, and they all go to the Fon of Nso in procession, carrying palm-wine, hundreds of flogs, stools, goats and chickens. This second ceremony is called *Kimbun Fon*.

Shufai Bernard Fonlon had a problem with his *Kitaayiy*. Since his mother was not of normal customary standing with the lineage of Boh in Dzens village where she was born, she did not qualify to welcome Dr Fonlon's high honours. So he had to go to the Jem lineage (*Taayiy bam* or maternal great-grandfather's lineage) to present his honours. There the necessary ceremonies were performed, and Shufai Fonlon was permitted to proceed with *Kimbun Fon*. Since then, the Jem and Boh lineages have been exchanging gifts and offering sacrifices to end the feud between them.

During Shufai Fonlon's *Kimbun Fon*, the lineage head of Faanjang (the neighbour of Papa Fonlon) and one of the leading groups of Seven Atarntoh - who administer the events of the Nto Nso - arranged for several young men of his lineage to accompany Shufai Fonlon and salute the Fon, and thus become adult citizens. After the *Kimbun Fon*, there was a grand reception organized by Dr Fonlon and his entire family.

6 Shufai Fonlon Receives the Title of Mkong-Metoh In 1982, the Bui people decided to organize the *Ngaay*, which in modern political language was the "Party Secretariat for Bui". At that time, while Mr Philemon Yang was the Minister for

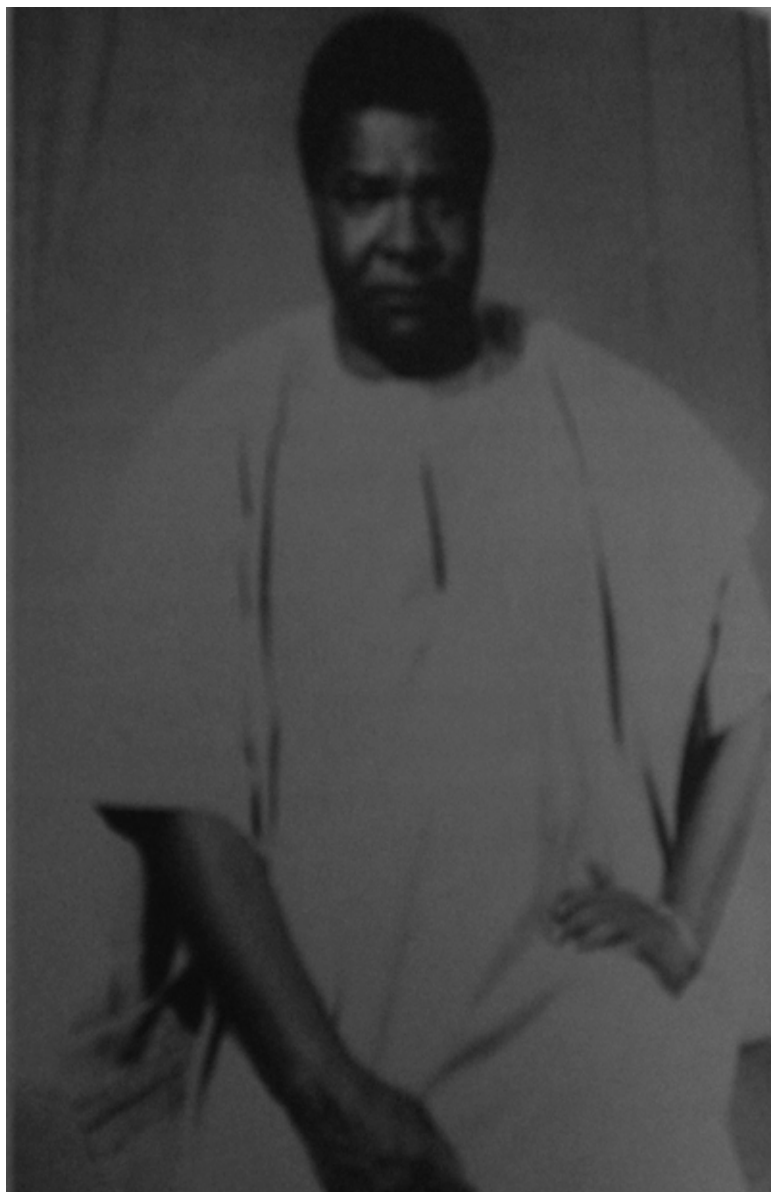
Mines and Energy, Shufai-wu-Ntu-Ndzev was member of the Central Committee of the party. The nucleus of the leadership for this major political party project was vested in the Bui elements resident in Yaounde. Other Nso communities living in all the provinces of the Republic set up provincial committees for the same purpose. Periodically, fund-raising rallies were organized in Bui division, and all the leaders from outside the division would form teams and then tour the various “fondoms” of Bui division, namely Oku, Mbiame, Djottin, Lassin, Nkar, Din and other villages.

During these rallies, while Mr Yang led one group to Mbiame, Shufai Fonlon led another to Oku. Indeed, before the launching of the Bui Section Secretariat Project, during his political tours Dr Fonlon habitually began his rallies at Oku. Hence in 1982, during one rally, the Fon of Oku was so pleased with this regular honour that he decided to name Shufai-wu-Ntu-Ndzev after the pioneer of the Oku Clan. So the Fon gave him the title of *Mkong-Metoh*, meaning “Pathfinder” or “Pioneer”, a leader who guides his people to fresher woods and pastures green. It was from this pioneer Mkong that the first Fon of Oku was descended. It is believed that after Mkong’s death, he was resurrected in the form of a snake, moved to a new site, and there disappeared. A palace has been built there in his honour, and sacrifices are offered annually by the Fon of Oku and the Kwifon. The place is hidden in the forest and is called “Lumetoo”.

Shufai Fonlon accepted the honour, and took it back to his lineage for blessing. On 24 April, 1983, Dr Fonlon organized a mission of thanks to the Fon of Oku. This again coincided with a fund-raising political rally. The Fon of Oku was very happy to receive him and gave him another decoration - this time a cap worn by nobles - and thus assimilated him into the ranks of Oku nobility. Present at this

ceremony were Mr Philemon Yang, Mr John Mforme Tata MP, Mr Peter Ndey, Mr Peter G. Nying, Mrs Margaret Kinshaf, Shey Philip G. Nsai and some members of Dr Fonlon's family. Tamfu Samuel Nshom Wambeng, a close friend, was one of the organizers of this big reception.

Conclusion The purpose of this account of Dr Fonlon's adapting to his African customary society is to emphasize how young African leaders who become alienated early in their lives, when pursuing Western formal education, have to be reintegrated. Later in their lives, they need to rejoin their local traditional societies, to give local leadership or to go into retirement. This is the story of Dr Fonlon's re-entry into Nso society.



Socrates in Cameroon: An Interview with Dr Bernard N. Fonlon

Richard Bjornson

Bernard Fonlon was one of the first Africans to earn his doctorate at a European university. He wrote his dissertation at the National University of Ireland, and it was the first extended comparative study of Black writings in English and French. During his visits to Paris at that time, he became acquainted with a number of French-speaking Black intellectuals and writers. Some of them nicknamed him the African Socrates, because he liked to philosophize and often quoted Latin and Greek proverbs in the original languages. Yet Bernard Fonlon was never an uncritical admirer of the West; he always identified with his own people from the Nso region in the hilly grasslands of Cameroon's Northwest Province, and he delighted in illustrating his points by referring to traditional customs and practices.

What distinguished him from most political and academic figures was the power of his vision and moral example. After his return to Cameroon in the early 1960s, he was asked to join the government. He held a succession of important posts and headed several ministries until he resigned from the government and became chairman of the Department of African Literature at the University of Yaounde in 1975. During these busy years Bernard Fonlon founded and edited *Abbia*, one of the most important cultural reviews in Africa. His writings include poems, critical essays and political commentaries; the unifying theme which emerges in all of them is a profound concern for human dignity and justice. In

fact, among Cameroonian public figures, no one has been more admired for moral integrity than Bernard Fonlon. The following interview took place in July, 1977, but it has lost nothing of the verve and freshness with which he described factors important in his early development, while at the same time expressing his views on crucial issues confronting African society and letters.

Bjornson: I've been struck by the number of people from Nso who are interested in intellectual matters. Is there anything in your early background there that would have caused you to follow the path that you have taken?

Fonlon: Nso was the first place where German missionaries built schools, when they arrived in the grasslands in 1912. When they were ousted by the British, the French fathers came and they continued in the same tradition until 1922, when the British took over and built up the schools even further. There were few or no local teachers, and I was taught by Englishmen and Irishmen from the very beginning: from primary school through secondary school, the seminary and the university. During all this time, we were in contact with peoples' minds, and that influenced us a very") great deal.

Bjornson: Some time ago you wrote a pamphlet entitled *To Every Son of Nso*. What prompted you to write that pamphlet, and what does it express about your relationship to your place?

Fonlon: I wrote that pamphlet, because in 1964, without me seeking it, I was co-opted into the political system. I was nominated to stand for parliament. I resisted for some time,

be my friends convinced me to accept, and I entered government ~ that time. In my place, animosities had been brought in by the introduction of political parties. There were two camps, and there was considerable rancor. People couldn't disagree and still be (J friendly terms. I wrote that booklet to educate the people, 1 eliminate this rancor, to bring them together and to create a sense of union as it had existed under the traditional form of government

Earlier, the Fon of Nso had had the loyalty of everybody. In other words, he was at the service of everybody. But the new politics set the whole place in chaos. I was writing to fight against that chaos and disharmony.

Bjornson: The co-operative of Nso is perhaps the most successful co-operative in Cameroon. Does the traditional social organization which you just mentioned have anything to do with this success?

Fonlon: Yes. The traditional social organization of Nso is communal. Once the Fon decides that a project is for the good of the community, everybody toes the line. If they decide that there should be a road, everybody works to build it. In addition to this spirit of co-operation, we have other organizations which are more effective in mobilizing the people than anything that the government can call upon. They are what we call *Manjong* or *Mfu*. When the Fon makes a decision, it is promulgated in the market under the sacred tree and then sent down to those societies, which meet once a week on the day after market day. From there, the decision is disseminated to the people. Originally, the Mfu or Manjong were societies for waging war. They could not declare war, but they were like an army, The Fon and his council were empowered to declare war and peace, and once they had

acted, the Manjong took over. Side-by-side with this organization, we had the *Ngwa*: that is, a group of grown-ups in the village. They meet one day in the week, and each contributes money. That money is given to one man for any project he wants to undertake. He could build a house or begin to trade. This is an ancient tradition. It's not borrowed from the outside, although it is not peculiar to Nso, for it exists throughout the grasslands. When the credit union came, it was just Ngwa writ large; it wasn't a new idea. Another thing that used to happen was this: if there was a calamity, people didn't wait until they were invited. As soon as people heard, for example, that a compound had burned down, everybody brought his bamboos, his thatch and his tools, and a new compound was built. When a young man was building his house for the first time, it wasn't his personal affair only; it became the affair of the entire village. This communal tradition is in the blood. Thus, when the government came with co-operatives, the idea caught on like wild fire. It was something the people knew about already. Yes, the success of the co-operative unions in Nso is due in large measure to the traditions that existed before and to the mentality that was created by these traditions.

Bjornson: Could you relate these traditional ideas of communal life to your own ideas of socialism in terms of the future of African states?

Fonlon: In our traditional society, the greatest source of revenue is the land, and the land is owned in common. Nobody in Nso can claim a right to any piece of land. The people are custodians; the Fon himself is the great custodian of Nso land. Subchiefs in various areas look after the land for him, and if anybody wants to farm or to build, he has only to

approach these people and get permission to use the land. If you go to one of these people who administers the land, you don't give him money. According to native law and tradition, you give him a calabash of wine and a fowl; that's all! Once that is done, you have the use of the land, but you must know that the land does not belong to you. Even if you build, or if you farm, you have only the use but not the ownership of the land. So already, we have a basic infrastructure which is socialist in its content. If we could extend these principles to the national level, that would be exactly what I want. Everything comes from the soil, doesn't it? Agriculture, even oil. Land is the principal source of revenue, and industry comes after. The land should belong to the government, and then authorities in various parts of the country could administer it for the people in the name of the government. If minerals were discovered, the same. Industries should be built and owned by the government for the good of the people. But of course with the modern mentality people becoming more conscious of money and more susceptible to greed - these things are apt to be abused at the national level. I'm not saying that the system I envisage will be run perfectly, but I am saying that it is an ideal which we should try to follow.

Bjornson: One of the biggest potential problems with this sort of socialism would be the accumulation of capital to develop existing resources, like the bauxite deposits in North Cameroon or the oil deposits off the coast of Victoria. Money usually comes from capitalist investors in the western world. Do you see any difficulty in accepting this money and the type of influence it often brings with it?

Fonlon: People have said that I am up in the clouds, that my feet 'are not on the ground, but when I look at the reality

today in Africa, I see a balkanized continent. Every head of state is so jealous of his own authority that there is no possibility of pooling resources. Each little head of state clings to his sovereignty and doesn't want any interference from outside. In that sort of situation, how can we obtain capital from our own people? It's impossible. We can only obtain capital from those who have money. To develop our resources, I would negotiate loans on several conditions, but I would try to keep the influence of international corporations to a minimum. I'll give you an example. When I was Minister of Transport, Post and Telecommunications, I wanted to build a station for communication by satellite. Canada offered us a loan of five million dollars payable in fifty years, with ten years' grace, at an interest rate of less than one percent. If capitalist countries could give us loans on such generous terms - in more important projects than telecommunications - I would not refuse aid from them because they have a capitalist system while I want a socialist one. That would be cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. Getting capital from African socialists would only be possible if Africa were united on a continental level. Then the rich could help the poor, and capital could be taken from one part of the continent to develop resources in another. To do this, we need a unity that is just not the sort of unity we have now with the Organization of African Unity, but a real political union - like the United States, like the Soviet Union, like China. After all, China has seven or eight hundred million people, and they can form a state, one state. The United States is a continent. The Soviet Union is a continent. India is a continent. And yet when we begin to talk about a continental union in Africa, people say we're not realistic; people say that it's impossible. Well, I don't think that it is impossible. In logic we say *Esse ad post se validum argumentum*; that is, an argument which proceeds

from what exists to what can be is a valid argument. Great states already exist with many millions of people. Why can't Africa do the same? Only those who do not want Africa to unite are saying that it's unrealistic. African heads of state are accomplices in this division, because each one clings desperately to his own little sovereignty. If they were prepared to surrender power in certain fields to achieve political unity, economic unity, unity in defence, in money, in foreign affairs, in these limited fields, that would help to bring about one of the best possible solutions for Africa. We have the men, if only they are prepared to be honest and to run the continent in the interests of all Africans.

Bjornson: One obstacle to unity is the great number of different languages, not only African languages, but also the languages of former colonizing powers: English, French, portuguese. Do you see any way of overcoming this language fragmentation? Some people have suggested that Swahili be adopted as a pan-African language. What do you think of that suggestion?

Fonlon: We are people in a hurry; we can't afford to wait until we have developed Swahili or any other language to cover the whole of Africa before we begin to act. We are living in a technological age, and the languages of technology are languages like English. African unity would be made easier if we adopted English, for example, as a working language. Why keep our own languages? I speak my own language, the language of Nso, and defend the idea that it be spoken in my area, but I know that for technical, economic and political advancement, the Nso language will be of little use. And for the moment, I doubt whether Swahili could serve the whole of Africa in this capacity. Even if it could, it

would cut us off from the rest of the world. Therefore, what I say is this: whether we adopt an African language or whether we retain our own languages, for wider communication we need languages that have already been developed. Personally, I see no conflict in having to learn English or French, English especially, because English is in the process of conquering the world. That may be only for a time, like Latin once did, when it was the language of the entire civilized world before it disappeared; English might disappear, but for the moment and for practical purposes of development, English is a language we could use for developing our economies, for establishing contact with the outside world. But we should not throwaway our own languages, because when you throwaway your language, you throwaway your culture, you lose a part of yourself. In Great Britain, scholars have revived the Cornish language that was dead. Now it's being studied. Gaelic is being studied in Scotland with reinforced vigour. The same in Ireland. There is a kind of double movement. People are trying to be themselves by reinforcing their own culture, but they don't forget that they belong to a world community and that, for a world community, you need a common language. In places like Russia, China and other great states of the world, English is in the process of becoming the working language. If you go to the United Nations, you are told that there are five official languages and two working languages, English and French, but in the end, in what language does the United Nations think? The United Nations thinks in English. So, you see, I believe in being practical while not denying our own culture. I hope that one day there will be an African language used by all Africans, but at the presentmoment, for reasons of technical and economic development and for contact with the rest of the world, we need a language of wider communication and preferably

English. I'm only being practical. We should not turn inward to ourselves; we need to have eyes turned outward, because no country today can live independently. Not even the United States or the Soviet Union. No, there's interdependence. And for interdependence, you need communication. And for communication, you need a common language. That's the reality from my point of view. That's why Cameroonians need to learn English and French and to learn them well - not just a garbage of any language, but a medium of communication which will be effective at the world level. These are absolute priorities.

Bjornson: You were very close to some of the people in the Negritude movement while you were in Paris, but in recent years many Cameroonians have taken a strong stand against Negritude. What is your position on this?

Fonlon: I'm very close to people like Alioune Diop, you know, and I've been in correspondence with Senghor, and Césaire is a personal friend of mine. I even made a stamp in his honour. If by Negritude one means what Black people even before the Negritude movement have said, all well and good. Finding that there is a Black aesthetic, for example. You cannot say that all the rules of aesthetics are White. You cannot say that if it's white it's beautiful and if it's black it is not. That sort of myth has to be destroyed. After all, there's beauty in ivory, and there's also beauty in ebony. If by Negritude one means we have to destroy a humiliating mentality that has been inculcated into us - that everything black is not beautiful, that Africans have no history, that they cannot think, that they're only children of emotion, that they have no philosophy - then I stand all for it. But we must remember that Du Bois began the Pan-African movement in

1900 with Sylvester Williams of Trinidad, and that, after the Second World War, he reinforced the movement. In the early 1900s, Garvey began the “Back to Africa” movement in New York: Africa for the Africans, Black is Beautiful, and much more. One can go even farther back. I’ve recently been reading the works of Antar, who was a black poet among the Arabs, and the theme of the beauty of the Black always comes up. Go back to the Bible. Solomon was white, and the Arabs were not dark. But among over 700 wives, the one on whom Solomon wrote his best poem, the Cantic of Canticles, or the Song of Songs, was black. He said, “I am black but beautiful.” I disagree with the particle: not “I am black *but* beautiful,” but “I am black *and* beautiful.” If this is what we are saying by Negritude, well and good. What we object to is preaching one thing and doing another - shouting about being African and preserving African culture, while remaining a Frenchman. That is not living what one preaches. And that’s what we’re against.

Bjornson: But one of the major objections of some Cameroonians is that Negritude does not always take into consideration the fact that Africans are just as capable of rational thought as white Europeans. They feel that attempts to impose a particular type of mentality on them would restrict them to a sterile emotionalism, to a culture which has become a museum piece. They feel that Africans have to belong to the modern world, to the world of technology, as well as the world of their own roots.

Fonlon: I agree with them completely. To say that thought is Greek and emotion is African, that’s nonsense. When I look at my own people and see the social structures and the government they’ve built up in Nso, I know we have

nothing to envy from the white man. The more I study, the more I respect those people, and the more I see that they must have been people who thought a great deal. It couldn't have come about by accident. To say that the African is a child of emotion, a stranger to thinking or to thought, that's abusing the African. No genuine African would accept such a theory. On the other hand, I do not value the extreme rigidity and coldness of the whites. Emotion has a part to play in life. Feeling is gradually disappearing in some countries. People are being regarded as numbers. Politicians sit down to calculate how they're going to seize power: they don't look after the people. They don't consider how many people are going to die in the process. It's like a scientist who sits down to calculate how many thousands of people his bomb will destroy. Under these circumstances, a humanist approach is necessary.

Bjornson: Is this an area in which you believe Africa has something to offer the rest of the world?

Fonlon: Yes, I think so. If the introduction of modern technology means that we are going to make Africans into things instead of human beings, that would be a serious mistake. We have to learn from the mistakes of Europe. In my opinion, extreme individualism is one of the greatest evils that plagues European society today. In a city like London with its millions of people, the greatest malady is loneliness. How can people be lonely when there are millions of them all around? This is a situation which should be remedied in the modern world. It's a situation which we in Africa should try to prevent. In traditional African society, a birth is a joy to everybody. A death is a sorrow to everybody. But in European society, it's every one for himself. A person could

live in a house like this or even in one section of a house, and if he died, he would die alone. The people next door would not care. They would not worry about what has happened, because there has been no communication between them. I saw this when I studied in Europe, and I thought it really unfortunate that such a situation could exist in countries where people were always talking about socialism, the welfare of individuals, and human rights. A spirit of concern for each other - that is what the African might offer to the rest of the world. If others are not prepared to learn from him, well let him keep it for himself. Otherwise he might lose it.

Bjornson: In this context, what do you think of Nyerere's form of socialism?

Fonlon: After Nkrumah, Dr Nyerere is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of African leaders. He has adopted socialism as a political philosophy and as a practical means of development, while trying to keep what is good in the African system. Villages being built along the Tanzan railway are not being built according to European models. Solidarity between people is encouraged; the people lead a common life. From that point of view, Dr Nyerere's approach is one that needs to be studied. I've not lived in Tanzania, and I cannot speak with authority, but from what I know, from what I've read, from what I've heard, and from what Tanzanians have told me, I think it is the nearest thing to success in socialism that we have in Africa.

Bjornson: You mentioned before that one of the greatest obstacles to human development in Africa has been created by the leaders of individual African states. What advice would you give to an African living in a state governed by an

autocratic dictator?

Fonlon: If there is somebody living in such a state and if he has something to contribute to the development of that state, he should give his contribution, whether or not he agrees with the system. For example, if a person is a teacher, he has knowledge to impart; he has young men to form. He should not refuse to disseminate his knowledge, just because he doesn't agree with the regime. After all, one has to make a distinction between the people and those who govern them. The governing and the governed are not always in agreement with each other.

Bjornson: But there are countries where this sort of service is not always possible. What sort of advice would you give to people living in countries like that?

Fonlon: One cannot advise a man to do the impossible. If I were in such a country, and if I found that I could not contribute my share to the development of the place, I would pack up and leave, rather than waste my time. After all, time is very, very precious. You could work in your particular field somewhere else. But if someone finds himself in an impossible situation, where he could be liquidated or butchered at any time, where intellectuals are simply smothered, I don't see what that person could do, whether he's an African or anyone else.

Bjornson: You would not suggest an armed revolution to overthrow such a government?

Fonlon: Well, as the American Constitution says, it is the governed who put the government in power, and they have the right to change it. People have a right to a government

that is worthy of them. But if change is to take place, it must be effected by Africans themselves. If an American came here as an agent of the CIA to foment discontent leading to the armed overthrow of an African government, I would not condone his position. If a person is doing his job sincerely, and if he is contributing to the development of the area where he is, let him do so. But if it becomes impossible, he should not lead an armed revolt against the government, because it's not his country. But if there's to be an armed revolt, let him go and lead an armed revolt in his own country, not in somebody else's.

Bjornson: What about an African who is living in his own country and who finds it difficult or impossible to exercise his powers in a way that contributes to the well-being of that country? Some people would argue that such a situation existed here in Cameroon some time ago; people took up armed rebellion at that time. You did not support those people, and I was wondering what your attitude would be today toward an African who realizes that he cannot work, cannot make a contribution to his own country. Would you say that he should leave his country rather than fomenting an armed uprising against an oppressive government?

Fonlon: It depends on the particular situation. If Africans in an African country find that their government is impossible, they have a right to change it. If they cannot change it democratically, then why not by revolution? It has been done, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly. Hardly any African country today has not had its own coup or two. But in so far as the individual African is concerned, what I am saying is this: if there is any peaceful way of bringing about change, it should be used, but one man by himself cannot

cause a change. He must be part of an organized movement for change. If he can't, he should follow the advice of the poet who said:

He who fights and runs away May live to fight another day But he who is in battle slain May never rise to fight again.

In a position like that, people who are in a position to help at a future date can abstain from armed revolt; they can live in exile in the hope that one day they will be able to participate in a more democratic process of change. After all, people have done it before, even under less dramatic circumstances. De Gaulle retired and remained silent for many years, but he came back with greater force and greater prestige to save France at a very critical moment. If de Gaulle had tried to force down his ideas in 1946, he might not have been able to save France in 1958. But one cannot be dogmatic about questions like this. It's a matter of studying the situation and seeing what can be done. In Cameroon we've had quite good fortune. I have worked with the President for many years, and I know that if there are causes for dissatisfaction, they don't emanate from him. They emanate from those around him those who don't have the same spirit as he has. Shortly after independence, there was an armed revolt, but personally I didn't belong to any political party at the time. I was more concerned with my studies, because I believe that it's when you have a high degree of instruction that you can actually contribute your share. What I did notice about those people who were opposed to the regime was this: they were very intolerant. Whenever there was an election, they always said, "Boycott the election!" Such a completely and constantly negative attitude doesn't contribute anything in the end. After all, life is short. As Dr

Aggrey said, “Ask for what you want. Take what you get. And use it to make them give you more of what you want.” In 1950 or 1951, Nkrumah asked for independence now, but the British didn’t give him independence “now”. Instead, they gave him a constitution which was not acceptable to him. But he accepted it and used it to get power, and when he was in power, he changed the system. If he had boycotted the elections and gone into the political wilderness, what would have changed? He would have accomplished nothing.

Bjornson: One of your heroes of the resistance movement in Cameroon was Reuben Urn Nyobe. What is your attitude towards his position?

Fonlon: Um Nyobe was the spearhead of the fight for independence here in Cameroon at a time when the UPC was the most powerful party in the country. In so far as he fought against the French regime to bring independence to Cameroon, he was a hero! He wanted to change the status quo. Every other country in Africa was becoming independent, why not Cameroon? If a man stood up to fight for independence, he was a great soldier and merits the respect of all Cameroonians. What Urn Nyobe would have become afterwards, nobody can tell. He died before he proved his full worth. But as far as his history goes, it would be hypocrisy not to render homage to a man like that.

Bjornson: Another inhibiting factor in the development of many African countries is the sheer weight of corruption in public office. You know that it exists, I know that it exists, everybody does. I was reading the import figures for Cameroon recently. One of the largest imports is champagne.

Mercedes Benz automobiles. Money spent on such luxuries might well be used for the development of the country. Do you believe there is any way this can be changed in African countries where it has already become a way of life?

Fonlon: It can only be changed by the people in authority, if they are convinced that these are wastes. For myself, I don't drink champagne. For one thing, it does not taste good to me. And I've never believed in having a Mercedes Benz. Even when I was a Minister, I went to work at the wheel of my Volkswagen. My argument was simple: the Mercedes Benz is a symbol of wealth you don't have. It's not a symbol of power. A head of state could go on foot to his work. After all, the Fon of N so, whom we regard as the highest authority in our part of the country, only recently began to ride in cars. Formerly, he always went on foot, especially when he was going to offer an important sacrifice. Today, people have got into habits of consumption. Civilization has become a civilization of consumption instead of production or creation; I am convinced that conspicuous consumption must be discouraged. I don't see any need whatsoever for riding in a Mercedes Benz. In the early sixties, a Mercedes Benz cost about 1,500,000 francs CFA. It now costs four million. Has the earning power of the Cameroonian increased *pare passu*? Why use four million francs on a Mercedes Benz when it can be used for something more productive? Why use such monies for luxuries? Personally, I believe with Gandhi that needing more and more is not a sign of civilization. True civilization consists in training oneself to need less and less. Or, as Socrates put it: "The gods are perfect because they need nothing." To need as little as possible is to make the nearest approach to God, and, therefore, the nearest approach to

perfection. That is my own way of looking at it.

Bjornson: You often quote from Latin masters; you know the Greek philosophers; and you know the classics of English Literature. What contribution have these writers made to the way you approach problems?

Fonlon: When I studied philosophy, I had to go to people like Aristotle and Plato. What struck me most about them was their emphasis on the good, on ethics. As far as English letters are concerned, I admire certain writers for the care and the pains they took in their productions. Even if a person is talented, he cannot just sit down and dash off a masterpiece. Good writers and good writing come from painful drudgery.

Bjornson: You once told me that, when you first were studying English, you read the complete works of Sir Walter Scott and Alfred Lord Tennyson. Why did these two particular writers attract you?

Fonlon: I stumbled on them almost by chance. I first read a piece by Sir Walter Scott back in the nineteen forties. It was called "The Combat". I was so thrilled by what I read that I decided to read more. Fortunately, I was at the Seminary in Nigeria then, and there was a Lansdowne collection of Scott's complete works in the library there. So I sat down and I read it from one end to the other. Then I asked myself, "Why have I always heard Sir Walter Scott spoken of as a novelist and never as a poet? If the English people have failed to acknowledge Sir Walter Scott as a great poet, his poetry must be of a very poor quality." But I liked his poetry. When I asked myself, "Why does it interest me so

much?" I discovered that Sir Walter Scott was talking about a culture very similar to my own. The people of Nso live in the highlands as the Gaels and the Scots did. They had chiefs, and they had clansman fealty to the chief. That was exactly the sort of culture to which I was accustomed. He was talking about things I could understand. Reading through Scott, I could see Nso. As for Tennyson, he was also a storyteller. Personally, I like stories; in addition, I found Tennyson was a purist in English literature - his language is really fine - and I said to myself, "If I want to master the English language, it would be an asset for me to study these." So I sat down for two years and did nothing else but study Scott and Tennyson from cover to cover, word after word. When I went to university, I hardly needed a dictionary, because whatever poet I took up, I found the same vocabulary.

Bjornson: You also spent a great deal of time on your study of Haubert. Did your meticulous examination of every sentence in his work contribute in some way to your mastery of the English language?

Fonlon: When a man is called a genius, it doesn't mean that he possesses all the capacities. A genius is only a spark that has to be developed. Even when you have a student who is intelligent, he needs to drudge; he needs to work. If he wants to be an effective writer, he needs to know the tools and rules of his craft. When I took up French, I found that Flaubert was among those who took meticulous care about their writing. He said it took him seven years to write *Madame Bovary*. The book is only about three hundred pages long, but the writing is so fine that, if you take away a word, you dislocate the whole sentence. From having recognised that, I might have gained something which influenced my own way

of writing.

Bjornson: After finishing your Master's on Haubert, you began to work on Black writing; in fact, you were one of the first to publish a dissertation on Black writing at a European university. What caused you to become interested in Black writing, and what impact did it have upon your thought?

Fonlon: I became interested in Black writing, because when I was a student living in Ireland, I spent most of my summers in France, where I came into contact with the Negritude men. Before that, I knew that Africans had undergone tribulations as slaves and as colonial subjects, but I didn't feel these tribulations very deeply. When I read what these people had written, I woke up. I wanted to know more about the Negro and his position in the world, about his history and the calamities he has undergone. That is why I decided to undertake a systematic study of Negro writings. There were three of us at that time. I was at the National University of Ireland. Soon afterwards, Jean Wagner and Madame Kesteloot began working in this area. Wagner wrote on American Negro writing. Lilian Kesteloot wrote on the writers of the Negritude movement. But I was perhaps the first to bridge the gap between the two, between the writers of English and French expression. I wanted to see whether differences of language changed anything, and I discovered that the main preoccupations remained the same. This knowledge gave me a keener awareness of the position of the Black race in the world. Before that, I had thought of Literature as the exclusive domain of the White man. To think of a Black man as a poet? In our day, that was like thinking of a monkey being able to write. When I studied Black writers for the first time, I was at the level to appreciate

good writing for myself. I saw that, as writers, they had nothing to envy the White man. When I announced that I was going to write my doctoral thesis on Negro poetry, on Negro writing, my professors said, "What? How? Does such a thing exist?" I had to produce books I had brought back from France and say, "Now, gentlemen, look at these books; they were written by niggers."

Bjornson: You mentioned the seminary earlier. Much of your own education took place in the Catholic church. But Cameroon is not a Catholic country; it also has large Protestant, Muslim, and Animist populations. Under these circumstances, what role can religion play in the development of the country?

Fonlon: The role of religion is one of furthering the moral development of the people. The church may undertake other forms of development - education, health-care projects, material construction - but principally its goal should be a moral one. What is it that has given Europeans their sense of duty, even when they have lost their religion? It is religion itself. After throwing off the revealed part of religion, they clung to the moral fiber which had been inculcated in them. Among the English, for instance, the sense of service, the sense of duty is remarkable. It's the one thing I admire them for. And it's what we lack. Real principle has a grounding in religion and it can help people by inculcating a moral sense of duty and public service.

Bjornson: As a final question, I'd like to ask what your own plans are for the future.

Fonlon: I don't have any plans, except that, after I have

finished my stint in the university, I'll retire to Nso, and there I'll pass the last days of my life. What else can I do? I have not garnered gold. I have not met anybody who is prepared to give me any, and I do not see any way of my having any luck in that direction. All I can do is to do my best for Nso, for the community, in any capacity I can.



Presentation of the K.N.D.P. Memorandum of the 1st of August, 1964

Bernard Fonlon

Upon a Rock or Upon Sand?

*... a wise man ...
built his house
upon a rock;
and the floods came and the winds blew
and beat upon that house, but it did not fall;
it was founded upon a rock. (Matthew 7, 24-25)*

The Forces that Create

Anything that comes into being is brought into being by four fundamental causes working in concert:

- 1 *the efficient cause*: the maker or creator to whose act the creature owes its existence;
- 2 *the final cause*: the purpose for which he undertakes to create, the need he hopes to satisfy thereby;
- 3 *the material cause*: the stuff of which the product is made, the substance which constitutes its being; and finally,
- 4 *the formal cause*: the shape that the maker gives to a specific quantity of matter to make the thing thus created different from others with the same material composition.

These four causes, in their operation, depend one upon the other by laws of internal logic; they are inextricably bound together by ties of intrinsic necessity. For without a maker nothing is made. Without material nothing is made, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Without a purpose driving from within, a maker will not move, for a purpose springs from a need burning internally; without an incentive, therefore, nothing can be made. The need of the maker and the material around him jointly inspire in his mind an image, an idea, that is, the form of the thing that would best serve his purpose and satisfy his need. Finally, the hand of the maker transfers this idea or form from the mind onto external matter. Nothing can ever come into existence unless it takes birth as an idea. That is why there is ample justification in the assertion that ideas are the most powerful things in the world.

Maker, purpose, matter and form - you cannot separate these, you cannot leave one out; all must be present for anything to be.

If being is to be realised in its fullest and best, the maker must brim with energy, must be fully equipped with knowledge and skill, must be armed with effective tools; secondly, he must be fired by a burning, lofty purpose; thirdly, he must have an ample supply of materials at hand; and fourthly, he must have an imagination fertile enough to create in his mind a form endowed with symmetry and colour; he must be able, thanks to his energy, his knowledge, his skill and his tools, so to transfer this mental form onto external matter as to give existence to an object that arouses admiration, that excites even awe.

In other words, nothing sublime can be effected in this world without knowledge and skill, without a lofty purpose, without keenness of imagination, without energetic action.

The commonest example which illustrates this general principle very aptly is the building of a house. It is the difference in degree, in the quality of builder, in the strength and loftiness of the purpose, in the worth and amount of material, in imaginative genius that creates the distance in excellence between a village hut and the Taj Mahal, between a rustic shrine and the Basilica of St Peter.

And just as it is with construction in the concrete, so also is it with any other human undertaking. The historical task at which we have been toiling since the 1 st of October, 1961, that is, the welding into one of the separated parts of our country, the creation of this multicultural, bilingual African State, is, *par excellence*, such an enterprise.

The Nature of Our Enterprise

Here we can see the four-fold causality plainly at work.

First, you have the makers - the entire Cameroon people under the joint leadership of the two main political parties.

Secondly, we are animated by a two-fold purpose, a general and a particular.

Our general purpose is that which is common to governments everywhere. I know of no better definition for it than that which was set in the inscription that the famous British historian, Thomas Babington Lord Macaulay, composed for a monument that was raised to the memory of a British Indian Viceroy, Lord William Bentinck. For this monument Macaulay wrote:

He infused into oriental despotism the spirit of British freedom and never forgot that the end of the government is the welfare of the governed; he abolished cruel rites, effaced humiliating distinctions and allowed liberty to the expression of public opinion.

The end of government is the welfare of the governed. A government ceases to be a government when it has forgotten that its very *raison d'etre* is the good of the people.

But now and again in the history of the world, a certain country is raised above the rest by the nature of things and by a concurrence of circumstances and given a particular purpose, for the benefit of its continent and of the world at large. Such was Greece with her mission for the promotion of philosophy, art and literature; Rome with that of law and government; such were Spain and Portugal for world exploration in the Middle Ages; such, today, are the Super-Powers, the USSR and the USA, commissioned by destiny to further superscience and conquer space and lead the human race to the stars.

Here in lowly Africa, in our own time, some countries, too, have now and again been saddled with a special purpose. Such was Egypt in the Suez crisis of 1956, commissioned to make an end of gunboat imperialism and to forge a way for the African socialist revolution. Such was Ghana charged to take the lead in the liberation of modern Negro Africa.

We have now entered a new era in the African revolution - the era of African unity. What does it mean, African Unity? It means the gathering of all the African families into one household. And here in Cameroon are represented all the African cultures and peoples from the Arabs to the Pygmies. It means the harmonising into one of all the main cultures that dominate the continent. And here in Cameroon we have

already the French and the English and soon may have the Iberian as well.

Cameroon is a complete micro-Africa.

It is clear, then, from the very nature of things that if there is an African country that can, without demagoguery, duly take upon itself the role of pilot through this stage of the African revolution, it is none other than our country.

To the general purpose, therefore, of working for the welfare of our people, our government has the special mission of taking the lead in the struggle for African Unity. This may sound airy and unrealistic, but when you realize that there can be no genuine freedom, no security whatsoever for Africa in her present state of balkanization, you will see that African Unity is by no means a luxury.

A leading and vigorous pursuance of this policy is the distinctive role whereby we shall write our country's name in letters of gold in the History of Africa.

If we let this chance slip, another such may never come!

What person, knowing the nature of our country, knowing its ethnic composition and seeing us forging here today, before his very eyes, the complete cultural and linguistic machinery that a United Africa would need tomorrow - what person seeing all this would dare to call us demagogues?

There is hardly anything so effective in knitting a people together as a lofty objective, an ideal at once fascinating and challenging to which they are driven irresistibly by a powerful national purpose. Without such greatness of incentive, there can be no greatness of effort, no greatness of achievement.

We all know what Nasser has done for Egypt. Those of us who have read his *Philosophy of the Revolution* know that his success is due in large measure to the fact that he was able to fire the Egyptian mind and will with a rousing ideology. And

today the whole of Egypt is up. In 1956 there came the test. For, in the Suez Crisis, the Anglo-French aggressors thought that they had only to strike Egypt to turn the Egyptians against Nasser. What a great miscalculation! The crisis only served to knit them around him closer than ever before. It was Eden who crumbled, not Nasser. It is Guy Mollet who is lost in the wilderness, not Nasser.

Every wise government strives to arouse such a purpose in its people. Here we have one offered to us by Nature and History, one that is fit to make our country stand out in Africa.

I have said that the house at which we have been working since 1st October, 1961, has builders and a purpose. It also has material that must be used, material which cannot be replaced by any other. And because what we are building is organic, a living body politic, this material is twofold, concrete and spiritual:

concrete: the two historic-geographical entities, East and West Cameroon, with their populations and resources;

spiritual: the principal cultures that have met in this federation. Lastly, what form did we choose to give to this matter? You all know the answer. We decided to respect the distinctiveness and originality of each state within the framework of a close-knit federation; we have chosen to orchestrate our diverse cultural contributions into a single symphony. Arbitrary absorption has been declared anathema. We have decided that whatever is true and good and beautiful shall live and move and have its being and work in concert with the rest within this federal framework. We have chosen Diversity in Unity, Unity in Diversity.

Such then are the fundamental causes that should shape

this singular undertaking.

The Time is Now

We of the K.N.D.P. know the fervour and the determined will that animated the struggle of our people for reunification, and the high hopes that fired this struggle. We have also come to see what this enterprise means to Africa.

We are, therefore, firmly determined never to betray unification, We are fully committed to the federation and we here pledge ourselves solemnly to work for its success.

But we know that for it to survive it must live and grow according to definite principles, principles which are not chosen arbitrarily, principles which arise, by themselves, from the very nature of this our national enterprise.

A traveller on the road stops from time to time to look back and see the ground he has covered; merchants close shops at intervals to take stock; users of machines are bound to service and overhaul them now and again.

Thus it is the most natural of things for people engaged in an enterprise such as this to halt, once in a while, to see how much ground has been covered, to draw up their balance sheet, to service or overhaul, if need be, the machinery of the State.

There can be hardly any other moment more self-offering, more natural, more opportune for such a thorough reappraisal than this time, when the transitional period of our constitution is drawing to a close and we are bracing ourselves to launch into the more permanent final stage.

It is therefore categorically imperative for us now to focus the searchlights of an objective, implacable and critical mind on the past three years; it is imperative for us to pass our action for that period beneath a powerful microscope, as it

were, to see whether we have been building according to the principles inherent in the nature of the enterprise itself.

But before going into that, I would like to stress and make it abundantly clear, in the name of the Central Working Committee of the K.N.D.P., that our desire to get this done is inspired in no way by bitterness, it is not a challenge; our overriding concern, as we have said, is the success of reunification, the health of our Federation. We are moved to this by our profound love for this country, by our deep concern for its welfare.

There is no place here, therefore, for angry recriminations, not to talk of dishonest motives. This is a family gathering; it is not a court of law. Our one concern shall be to state facts as they are, or at least as we see them.

But our seeing may be faulty. There may be other facts which have escaped our observation. We lay no claim to a monopoly on knowledge and wisdom. But we do assert, categorically, that our motives are pure and sincere. Therefore, if our conclusions are proved wrong or exaggerated, we will be prompt to abandon or correct them.

All we ask is that in this discussion no question whatsoever should be considered taboo.

As one who wants to rip an abscess open, let us get out the knife and do the job, however delicate the part of the body affected may be. As men intent on a good job of cleaning, let us shake out the carpets, let us probe into every corner. Nothing should be considered too delicate or too sacred to touch.

The Need for a Permanent Dialogue

This said, let us go back to the question of whether our building thus far has been based on principles demanded by

the nature of the work. It is an important question; for success in dealing with things demands that each shall be treated according to its nature.

This brings us once again to the principle of the four causes on which each and everything depends for its being.

First the builders: in this enterprise there are two sets of them, two communities, two political parties divided in background, mentality and methods.

If the builders that stand addressed to one and the same task are so different, how can they work in concert, how can they ever begin at all except if they first sit down and *discuss* and *agree* on the purpose of the building, on the materials to use and on the form the house should take?

Unless building is preceded by discussion and agreement, one of two things will happen. Either each party will try to work according to his own ideas and we will have the confusion of Babel reenacted once again, or the stronger party will usurp the enterprise and reduce the weaker partner to a passive onlooker. When this happens, there can be no other outcome but discontent and frustration.

In fact, this second thing is what has happened and is happening. Since we came together, the K.N.D.P. has hardly done more than stand by and look on. For, talking sincerely, can we name one single policy in any field - economics, education, internal affairs, external affairs - that has been worked out jointly by the two parties? Can we point a finger at one idea that took birth in the K.N.D.P. and was welcomed and implemented by this government?

There is disillusionment; discontent and frustration are sinking and spreading. There is nothing so calculated to wring and crush the human spirit, before a lofty enterprise, as to know what should be done and yet to have to stand by impotent and see the opposite taking place. This desperation

can become explosive.

The K.N.D.P. demands to take a genuine part in the making of this country.

Discussion and agreement, first on theoretical principles, on doctrine or policy, that is, and then on a definite practical programme based on that policy are absolutely necessary in this coalition, as they are in any other, anywhere, at any time. They belong to the nature of the thing.

Examination shows, as I have stressed above, that there is hardly one single idea contributed by the K.N.D.P. to federal government policy since we came together. The two parties have never met to define a general policy as a framework for all government action, or to agree on particular policies in definite fields of activity economics, money, foreign affairs, defence, education.

Furthermore, when you share in a government, you share full responsibility for its actions; you share the credit for its achievements, the blame for its blunders. Thus, it cannot be a matter of indifference to you how this government is constituted or what policy it espouses. Any chief of government or of state picks his team as he judges best; but this surely does not exclude consultation with his partners in coalition to hear their views about his choice.

Indeed, arguing logically from the premises enunciated above, the K.N.D.P. claims it as a right, on principle, as a partaker in this coalition, to have a say not merely in the choice of the members which it supplies to the government, but also in that of those put forward by its partner in coalition. The K.N.D.P. claims its say, more especially, over what seats should be given to it in the government in order that it may be able, thereby, to make a fitting and honourable contribution to the building of this nation.

There is nothing extraordinary in this demand: whenever

there is a coalition government, negotiation on ministerial portfolios is an absolute prerequisite.

We contend that discussion, negotiation and agreement, as outlined above, have not been the rule in our coalition in the past three years. Who was responsible for this? Was it an oversight on his part or was it a deliberate slight? Such questions are beside the point now; as I said before, we are not here in court. What is relevant is that they should be the rule as from this time.

Discussion, negotiation and agreement prior to coalition are absolutely necessary, because any political party worthy of the name is committed to certain principles or doctrines or ideas, to a consequent programme which it cannot abandon without betraying its very soul. And when two such parties are entering into a coalition, each should know precisely what margin of its ideology it can surrender and still remain true to itself.

The Moro-Nenni coalition in Italy was in the throes of a government crisis some time ago; the problem was precisely this: how much of their democracy Moro's democrats could part with, how much of their socialism Nenni's socialists could give up, how much of its partner's ideology each could accept, in order to make co-operation and joint action possible.

And yet between the K.N.D.P. and the U.C. the task is infinitely easier than between Moro and Nenni.

This principle of a permanent dialogue between our parties in coalition is of such overwhelming importance that it cannot be left to the discretion of individuals; it must be given the sanction of law.

Therefore, in order that at every stage of this work of construction there should be discussion and agreement between the parties before government action, it shall be

necessary, categorically, to make specific provision in our constitution for a Council of Ministers, where government measures shall be debated thoroughly and agreed upon before they are submitted to the President for his signature.

Thus, thanks to debate at the regular meetings of the Council of Ministers and thanks to frequent meetings at the party level, an unbroken and fruitful dialogue will be kept alive within the coalition. Even where there is only one party, a government cannot succeed without full, frank and free debate. How much more where there are two!

It is only by making sure that decision shall be preceded by discussion and agreement, that each party shall be enabled to participate effectively in the building of this nation.

What general direction we should choose for our country; what orientation we should elect for the development of our economy; what structure and what spirit we should give to the education of our youth; how we should organise our judiciary, our administration, our social services; with what countries abroad we should knot any ties; what should our stand be on principal world issues, on major African problems - the K.N.D.P. demands to have an effective say on every one of these.

Briefly, we demand effective participation in the conception, the elaboration and the application of policy in every field of government.

The Stuff of the State

With regard to the material we have to use, I have pointed out that it consists of the two federated states with their territories and resources and their populations with their respective cultures.

In so far as this complex material is concerned, the most

imperious duty incumbent on the makers is to acquire thorough knowledge of the said material: we must study our country in every detail. We must know our two populations thoroughly - how each has been shaped by the historical forces that have worked upon it through the years, in other words, the sort of mind it has inherited from the past. This entails careful study, thorough knowledge of the cultures that have met in this country. No man can govern successfully a people he does not understand; for each thing on this earth demands to be treated or used according to its nature. We cannot build with liquid; nor is it normal in construction work to use thatch for laying the foundation and rocks for roofing.

To succeed in this national enterprise, therefore, it is an absolute must for us to know our country, to know our people; we would have to examine carefully the cultural contribution that each group has brought, and use all that is true and good and beautiful in both to produce a new well-orchestrated symphony.

Long, long ago, the ancients saw the absolute need for this very clearly: Plato in the fifth book of his immortal work, *The Republic*, says that unless those who govern become philosophers, become thinkers, there will be no respite from evil, for states, or for humanity. And Aristotle, in the third book of his *Politics*, states that a good state is not the work of fortune but of knowledge and purpose.

The Soul of the State

As I have said before, the shape we want to give to our country is that of a unity in which due respect is given to diversity, that is, a closely-knit federation; a politico-cultural entity where each constituent element contributes a

distinctive and original part to the harmonised whole.

But a builder, even before he begins, must conceive in his imagination the form he intends to give to his house. Next he finds an architect who sets this form on paper; it is with this architectural plan before his eyes that the builder works; it is with the aid of this plan that the original idea in the conceiver's mind is finally given concrete existence as a house.

What is the architectural plan that expresses on paper the idea of the state we are building, the plan that guides us in the setting up of our institution in the solid?

It can be nothing other than our constitution. A constitution is not only the form of the state expressed in thought and word, it is also that which gives to concrete institutions a foundation and a justification in law.

A constitution is to the state what the soul is to man.

To be sound it must take into consideration the purpose of the builder and the nature of the material he has to use. If a constitution is faulty, it follows logically that the state which is the incarnation of that constitution cannot be sound in its being, because its soul is sick.

Now that our transitional period is drawing to a close, the K.N.D.P. is putting forward a very earnest plea, that it is soundest common sense, that it is absolutely necessary to re-examine our present constitution thoroughly, in the light of the experience of the past three years, before we launch forward into the final stage.

To refuse to do this would be the gravest error.

Authority and Knowledge

As I said at the start, four indispensable causes or agencies concur in the creation or production of anything

whatsoever - the maker, the purpose, the matter and the form.

Notice the overwhelming importance of the maker in this operation: it is within him that the need or the purpose arises and burns; it is he who conceives the form; it is he who transfers this form onto external material and thus confers on such material a new and heightened worth.

Generally, in order to do this, he needs science in his head, skill with tools and force in his hand.

But when there is the question of the building of a state, he needs something further - a commission from the people, the final source of sovereignty.

Authority, knowledge, know-how and energy - these are absolutely necessary for the builders of any state.

Where people are fortunate, it can happen that all these requirements are found in one and the same chief, in each government department, as in the outstanding case of Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, the author of the famous *Wirtschaftswunder*, the astounding German post-war economic recovery; he was not only the minister for economic affairs during the era of Adenauer but also a university professor in that subject.

More often than not, however, both political authority and skilled knowledge are not found in the same person. This is the case with us and it is no humiliation whatsoever, on our part, to admit that it is so. Among us, the wielders of authority are separate from the pliers of skill - the politician and the intellectual stand apart.

And there is a danger that, instead of complementing each other as they should, these two may become suspicious partners, scheming rivals or even sworn enemies. A disaster to the State!

But so necessary is the contribution of each that they

must, at all costs, strive to work as united in this enterprise of national reconstruction as hand and eye are united in the same worker.

At the height of the Profumo scandal that rocked his government to its very foundations, Mr Harold Macmillan, former Prime Minister of Great Britain, was asked at a press conference which he thought was the wisest government. His answer came quick and clear: it is that government, said he, which knows how to use both *thinkers* and *doers*. Macmillan, with over forty years of parliamentary experience, certainly knew what he was talking about.

Thought without action is sterile. Action without thought is leaping in the dark; very often it has meant political suicide.

But since it is only the politician who has received a mandate from the people, it is principally with him that the responsibility rests to take all measures necessary to associate the intellectual closely with himself in the building of the state.

To do this is not merely sound wisdom, as Macmillan says; it is not the conferring of a favour that may be withheld or withdrawn at pleasure; it is a duty, a duty that leaves no choice, a duty that must be done and done judiciously. In short, the Cameroon Government has the sacred obligation to use the Cameroon intellectuals where each fits most by reason of the calibre of his mind, his specialised training and the fibre of his character.

It may happen sometimes that so-called intellectuals occasion great disappointment because of gross irresponsibility. Where this occurs and is proved beyond question, let them have the consequences. But the ill-discipline of a few does not justify distrust of all and sundry.

Indeed, seeing how indispensable both *the man of action*

and *the man of thought* are to the state, nothing should be left undone to further between the two a spirit of genuine brotherhood and an atmosphere of sympathetic understanding.

Since it is necessary that our men of skill formed in school and college should gain practical experience at work, we should lay it down as a rule that where we are compelled to use the foreign expert, a well-qualified Cameroonian should be assigned to work side by side with the stranger in order to take over from him as soon as possible; for it should be a cardinal principle with us that, as this is an African nation, its principal builders should be African.

In bringing this introduction to a close, I want to say and say again, and say from the depth of my being, in the name of my colleagues, that the spirit which moved the K.N.D.P. to appeal to the U.C. for this get-together is not, in the least, one of festering bitterness. We stress again that it is our profound love for this country, our detennination to leave no stone untumed for the success of reunification which has prompted this appeal.

We want to sit down together as one family and talk with open hearts, because we know how disastrous it can be, in an enterprise of these dimensions, to neglect fundamental principles or to despise the intrinsic causes without which no human undertaking can be brought to perfect being.

What then do we want exactly?

In order to close with proposals practical and precise, I will spell out clearly the claims of the K.N.D.P.

We demand:

1 That discussion, negotiation and agreement should become the rule in this coalition as from this day, in order to

ensure for the K.N.D.P. a dignified participation in this government and an effective contribution in the conception, the elaboration and the implementation of all government policy;

2 That a general framework policy and particular applications of it in the diverse fields should be defined and adopted jointly by the two parties to give coherence and direction to all government action; and that concrete programmes should be drawn up to embody these policies;

3 That a machinery should be set up at party and government levels for the efficient and effective carrying out of the above proposals; at the party level a permanent committee should be set up where representatives from both sides shall meet regularly to draw up government policy:

4 That the constitution should be revised to provide, *inter alia*, for a Council of Ministers in which government projects from all ministries shall be fully, freely and frankly debated before they are submitted to the Head of State or Government for his signature; in other words, we call for the reinstallation of the principle that all government decisions should be taken in council;

5 That an *ad hoc* committee should be set up right away to work out the details of these suggestions;

6 That these proposals should be studied, worked out and put into effect before the final close of the transitional period, that is, before the forthcoming presidential elections.

Such then are the proposals of the K.N.D.P.; we hope

they are clear and precise.

We call upon you, therefore, brothers and co-builders, to hear us with sympathetic understanding. As I have said, again and again, we are not making this appeal in a fault-finding spirit. We are making it because of our love for this country, because of our faith in its destiny, because of our concern for its welfare and prestige. We make it because we are mindful of the solemn words of practical wisdom addressed to all builders in the Sermon on the Mount. For, taking heed of that warning, we know for certain that if, in accomplishing the task that history has set for us, we respect inherent, basic laws, if we respect the nature of things, we would be:

*like a wise man who built his house upon a rock;
and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew
and beat upon that house but it did not fall; for
it was founded
upon a rock.*

But if we shut ear and eye to fundamental principles, if we refuse to do things as they should be done, if we despise and reject the elementary canons without which no partners in coalition can work like a team, we would be:

*like a fool
who built his house upon sand;
and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew
and beat upon that house, and it fell;
and great was the fall thereof*

It is by working with these words ringing ever in our ears, it is by keeping them always in mind, that we will be able to raise in this corner of Africa an edifice and a name that will

stand the test of time. It is only by fortifying ourselves with the sure and solid wisdom inspired by this solemn warning, and nourished by deep meditation and by an unbroken, fruitful dialogue, that we of this coalition can go forth afresh, and go forth with confidence, to govern and to guide.

Hommage au Docteur Fonlon

Jean Dejeux

Le Docteur Fonlon, au nom du departement de Litterature negro-africaine de l'Universite de Yaounde, m'avait invite a donner un mois de cours du premier fevrier au deuxieme mars 1979, puis a venir faire partie de jury de theses sur les litteratures africains, y compris le Maghreb, le vingtieme mars 1981. Je lui suis infiniment reconnaissant de ces invitations car ces rencontres m'ont enrichi culturellement et humainement.

D'abord par cette rencontre avec le Docteur Fonlon lui-meme: homme accueillant et direct, disant ce qu'il pensait sans tergiversation. Sa competence dans le domaine de la litterature africaine etait manifeste et il etait parfaitement apte a diriger ce departement de Litterature negro-africaine ou travaillaient - et travaillent toujours - des professeurs qualifies. Tres enracine dans son peuple en meme temps que tres ouvert au monde d'aujourd'hui, connu ailleurs dans des universites (americaines entre autres et bien sur africaines) etrangeres; il etait donc une reference et il faisait honneur a son pays sur le plan scientifique.

Homme de la parole vraie, sans faux fuyant, le Docteur Fonlon m'a accueilli avec chaleur humaine. Il etait attentif a mon enseignement puisque c'est lui (avec le departement negro-africaine) qui avait sollicite un cours sur la litterature du Maghreb, allant a contre courant meme de certaines opinions qui ne tenaient pas a cette ouverture vers le monde arabe. Je lui en suis tres reconnaissant. Cela manifestait donc sa largeur de vues et son dynamisme pour un enseignement aussi large

que possible en Afrique. Le Maghreb fait partie de l'Afrique. Ces cours sur la littérature maghrébine avaient donc leur place; ils continuent d'ailleurs. En cela l'Université de Yaounde, à travers son département de littérature négro-africaine, est en pointe parmi les Universités d'Afrique. Certaines autres prennent actuellement le même chemin ou du moins desirent le prendre.

Personnellement, je retiens de ces séjours à l'Université de Yaounde et de cette rencontre avec le Docteur Fonlon et ses collaborateurs un apport très positif: un enrichissement humain, une sympathie profonde, ayant rencontré là, tant dans le Docteur Fonlon que dans les enseignants, des Camerounais qui croyaient à ce qu'ils faisaient et qui le faisaient dans l'enthousiasme, construisant le pays, formant des générations qui auraient à être fières et dignes de leurs enseignants à l'Université. Le Docteur Fonlon était l'âme de cet enseignement. Il travaillait dans la vérité et dans la lumière.

Tribute to Doctor Fonlon

Ethna Byrne Costigan

[Written in support of Dr Fonlon's appointment as the Professor of African Literature in the University of Cameroon, Yaounde.]

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN, 26 Jan. 1970

Monsieur V. Ateba [Minister of the Public Service, Republic Federal du Cameroun]

Dear Sir,

I have received this morning your letter of 16 Jan. requesting me to testify to the ability of Dr. Bernard Fonlon and his fitness to be integrated in the *Corps de l'Enseignement*.

I am delighted to give this testimonial for there is absolutely no doubt about his qualifications for such a posting.

I have known Dr. Fonlon since he entered my Department (Romance Languages) in University College Cork to begin reading courses leading to the B.A. Honours Degree in French. He then proceeded to do his M.A. Degree on the subject of Flaubert and received this further Degree with equally high Honours. His next step was the preparation of a thesis on *La poesie et le reve!! de l'homme noir*, 1961. He did this under my direction. His work was excellent and was highly praised by our External Examiner. I hope it will be published.

Dr. Fonlon is, I believe, the most distinguished and

outstanding student that I ever had in my 30 years as Professor and Head of the Dept. of Romance Languages: 1939-1969.

I should explain that, having reached the Statutory Age, I retired from my chair at U.C.C. on 30 Sept. 1969. I was immediately asked by Trinity College Dublin to lecture on Ancient Italian and Philology twice a week. I have been doing this work, being a Comparative Philologist, since the opening of the Session in Oct. 1969.

It would be hard to overpraise Dr. Fonlon; he joins to outstanding ability a great capacity for hard work. He was always an excellent student, both as an Under-Graduate and a post-Graduate student. I warmly recommend him for integration as a *Prolesseur-Adjoint*. I think he must be the highest placed person in the present cadre. During the past 8 years, Dr. Fonlon, in spite of his heavy responsibilities as Minister, has spearheaded the cultural movement in his country and has made Cameroon known abroad in his capacity as Director and regular contributor to *Abbia*, the Cameroon Cultural Review. We here in Ireland think very highly of such an initiative as founding a bilingual review, since we have the two languages (Irish and English) problem here in our own country. I read every issue of *Abbia* regularly. It is also received in the Library of University College Cork where it is regularly read. I must say that if anyone, in Cameroon or outside, were asked who is the foremost Cameroon intellectual, the inevitable answer would be: Bernard Fonlon. He will certainly grace your *Cadre de l'Enseignement Supérieure*. I can think of no one more worthy. I wish to recommend him to you most warmly.

E. Byrne Costiga

M.A., D.-es-I

Emeritus Professor of Romance Languages, NUI Grand'

Ufficial dell 'Ordine al Merits della Repubblica Italiana

Avis Concernant Docteur Fonlon

William McCausland Stewart

[Written in support of Dr Fonlon's appointment as Professor and Head of the Department of African Literature in the University of Cameroon.]

Bristol, 29 Janvier. 1970.

Monsieur le Ministre,

Je vous remercie de votre lettre du 15 janvier.

Je suis tres heureux de vous communiquer l'avis que vous me demandez concernant Monsieur le Docteur Fonlon. J' ai en effet preside le Jury quilui a confere en 1961 le grade de Docteur (Ph.D.) de la National University of Ireland.

J'ai ete d'ailleurs deja un des examinateurs de sa These pour le M.A. en 1958, et me trouve donc dans la position de pouvoir temoigner de la solidite de son travail et de l'envergure de ses etudes et de ses recherches dans plusieurs domaines. La forte culture fondamentale et generale dont il dispose le rend d'autant plus apte a voir l' essentiel dans l' enseignement superieur - ou il s' agit pour ceux qui comme lui ont acquis leurs titres de chercheur (ce qui est pleinement son cas) de poursuivre et faire poursuivre des recherches et des etudes avancees a bon escient.

J'ai pu d'ailleurs noter rapport qu'il a fait, pendant les annees qui interviennent, a cette grande tache d'unification nationale et culturelle de votre pays, qui a la particularite d'etre fortement francophone, mais en meme temps anglophone -

ayant pu lire regulierement la revue qu'il dirige - et tout recemment, avec le plus grand interet et le plus grand profit sa contribution recente, si riche, sur "The Language Problem in Cameroon - an Historical Prespective" . Tout ce travail ne fait que renforcer les titres aquis mentionnes plus haut, qui le qualifient pleinement, me parait-il a enseigner comme professeur dans une Faculte des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines ou dans une Ecole Normale Superieure. Je vous prie, Monsieur le Ministre, d'agr6er l'expression de mes sentiments les plus distingues.

Professeur William McCausland Stewart, MA, D.Litt.
A Monsieur Victor ATEBA

Ministre-Adjoint delegue a la Fonction Publique Yaounde
Cameroun.

Professor Bernard Fonlon, Magister Magnus Fere Caelestis: A Citation of Respect

Kevin Mbayn

In the year 326 B.C., as all schoolboys know, Alexander the Great said, “I assure you I had rather excel others in the knowledge of what is excellent, than in the extent of my power and dominion” (*Lives*, Plutarch). And the matchless Bernard Fonlon, an educated Cameroonian citizen, agreed with him blood, flesh and bones unto the end of his days. This was on Tuesday the 26th of August, 1986.

It would be hard for me to resist the urge to write a humble word or two in honour of a great and deathless teacher of Dr Fonlon’s distinction. A man I have known. A man I have taken to task in private and in public in the interest of academic clarity and intellectual finesse. A man that merited more than a song in his lifetime, but would have sacrificed every merit to be left unsung in life or in the life after, a man yet to be fully discovered and savoured by his fellow countrymen, the Cameroonian rank and file.

Those equipped to appreciate the Doctor’s human magnitude and intellectual splendour may yet be few in our times, but the mass majority is ultimately the beneficiary of his ideas, actions and example. For an intellectual is not useful until society at large stands to benefit from the methods and effects of his intellect either in act or in potency.

Themistocles, the great Athenian general, being asked whether he would choose to marry his daughter to an indigent man of merit or to a worthless man of estate, replied that he would prefer a man who was without estate in the

mundane sense of the term yet who was a man beyond compare. Bernard Fonlon held positions in and out of government which lesser Cameroonians would have used to gain estates and enormous property. But Dr Fonlon walked apart from them, as if to affirm with Aeschylus the poet:

Make not my path offensive to the gods By spreading it with carpets.
(*Agamemnon*)

Diplomate in Education of the University of Oxford, Theologian from Bigard, Master of Arts, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*), Founder of *Abbia*, Prime mover of the Association for Creative Teaching, Nationalist, Statesman, Fulbright Professor, Classicist and Scholar, Professor (*magna cum laude*) of the University of Yaounde, Humanist and Author, Teacher in his very being, Pride of all Africa, Humble Citizen of the World, Defender of the Philosophers, Defender of the true University, Defender of the Intellect, Defender of the Faith of his own conviction and by the will of God, Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, gentle in manner but firm in deed, has now taken his place, *otium cum dignitate*, with his forefathers in the blissful land of the living -dead.

To all but the physically and mentally blind, this man was a citizen and a teacher with a difference. His students, past students as well as those yet to learn from him, are of all grades and of every social station. For he taught not only the younger generation of Cameroonians, Nigerians, Americans, Canadians and Europeans in and out of the classroom from Kindergarten through University to life, but he was also, and is still even in death, a teacher by example to the older generation as well.

Dr Fonlon in precept and in practice and by pristine

example was a teacher to teachers that teachers may learn; a teacher to politicians and cabinet ministers, that they may learn about honesty and accountability; a teacher to literary artists, that they may learn not only the art but the science of their craft; a teacher to the makers of universities, that they may learn about the indivisible trinity that must unite in a university, and the scientific and philosophical nature of the studies that must be undertaken in this institution; a teacher to lovers of music, that they may learn to savour the works of classical and deathless masters; a teacher to aspiring polyglots and linguists, that they may learn to insist on the crucial importance of language in the process of education; a teacher to all workers in the area of culture and all men of culture, that they may learn that culture is at the heart of development, and at the heart of culture is religion and respect for the supreme godhead and for one's fellow man, and hence the absurdity of discrimination against school certificates obtained in this area of the humanities; and a teacher to Priests, Bishops and ex-seminarians, that they may learn what responsibilities they bear on their shoulders before man and God, and how the philosophy of their learning should be deployed and give direction and meaning to their efforts. To the latter category, to ex-seminarians anywhere in the world, Bernard Ponlon is more than a teacher. He is a standard-bearer of Spartan proportions. He speaks to them in their own language, saying with the Master: To whom much is given, much is expected (*aut in ecclesia universa, aut in mundo*) in the church or in the world.

Bernard Ponlon is a teacher to every human being that all may learn that "Mind is Master", not mammon; that mind is spirit and therefore by force of syllogism spirit is master, not mammon, nor power, nor dominion. Consequently, spiritual, moral and intellectual values are superior to the purely

material, which depend for their worth on the capricious and transient acclamations of the uninformed rabble. What a difference it would make to the commonwealth of Cameroon (the *Res Publica*) if operators of the political establishment could borrow a leaf from the matchless Bernard Fonlon!

This humble teacher sought no accommodation with mediocrity, nor with the enticements and appurtenances of material greatness. He sought no deal with timid or unreasoned opinion, nor with clandestine falsehood. A votary of hard work and perseverance, he shared his unflinching motto with the British Royal Air Force:

Per Ardua Ad Astra (through hard work to the stars). Would that lovers of ease, lovers of gain without pain, of the cult of facility and the line of least resistance borrow a leaf from Bernard, the teacher! He maintained, *ipsi dixit*, and with due honours to Dr Cornelius Holy, his philosophical praeceptor, “that he who would succeed in any enterprise must shun delights and live laborious days. And this is truer still of him who would influence society by his pen.”

Dr Bernard was a teacher with a pen that knew neither lull nor remission in the task of guiding and influencing society, a responsibility which he executed with humility but with a sober, incisive, intellectual and pedagogical intrepidity yet to be surpassed in this country, his own fatherland. He knew that if his own living example was the best way of talking to his fellow countrymen in his lifetime, his written works would be his *spes unica* after death.

Author of Cameroon’s “Syllabus Errorum”, Dr Fonlon was irrefutably committed to the moral health of the City, the Country, the Academia and the Cathedral, without leniency to the Courts of the land. Several times did he intervene in justice to save innocent, poor and powerless countrymen from the corrupt avarice of a swaggering political overlord

whose ego stood to gain from the immediate imprisonment of lesser folk.

Horace observed in his *Ars Poetica* that “scholars dispute but the case remains before the courts” (*Grammatici certant et adhuc sub iudice lis est*). But Bernard Fonlon, a maker of letters and a scholar, disputed and took the case out of the courts in defence of the weak. An admirer of D.H. Lawrence, Bernard Fonlon nevertheless refused to add evidence and fodder to the former’s affirmation that “Money is our madness, our vast collective madness.” For he consistently refused to be corrupted by money. He preferred to inscribe his simple name in the hall of fame, affirming with Robert Edward Lee that:

Duty is the sublimest word in our language.

Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.

(Inscription in the Hall of Fame)

In the sober humility of this Cameroonian it must be said that far and few, far and few indeed, are the generations in which the Bernard Fonlons live. Those he has saved from the harrowing fangs of injustice; those he has redeemed from the cold, serpentine fingers of ignorance; those students he has saved from *extra modum* academic abuses; those children he adopted and educated in the spirit of informed philanthropy and Christian love; those who take pride in the existence of the Cameroon Airlines; those who enjoy the lyric beauty of the English version of Cameroon’s national anthem; those who appreciate the academic and cultural status of the *Abbia Cultural Review*; those who savoured the selection and explications of good music as it was borne into their living rooms and bedrooms by radio; those who admire teachers

who teach by moral example; those who salute the gallantry and courage of a fit fighting soldier even when the last comrade-in-arms has fallen on the field; and those who, like Bernard Fonlon, are votaries and advocates of the *Philosophia Perennis* as a solid crucible for the development of mental culture, for the cultivation of arts and science, and classical as well as modern letters, must now woefully agree with Francis Thompson, the Poet Mystic, that:

*The fairest things have swiftest end,
Their scent survives their close;
But the rose's scent is bitterness
To him that loved the rose.*

To this laconic verse, I am personally persuaded that generations of Cameroonians to come shall add dirges upon dirges each time the quality of truth for which Bernard Fonlon stood gets suffocated at the expense of a people, any people.

May the Lord grant Dr Fonlon's soul rest and peace. Peace which Bernard, the teacher, worked for and deserved in space and time, but which the Lord in his mercy gives us AD INFINITUM.

Reflections in the Churchyard of Kumbo Cathedral, 8 a.m. February 27, 1988

Victor Anomah Ngu

Bernard Fonlon, M.A., Ph.D. (NUL), Dip. Ed. (Oxon.), Professor, born 19 November, 1924, died 26 August, 1986. That is what was printed on Bernard Fonlon's tombstone. That was what he was called when he lived with us until that fateful but happy day in August, 1986, when Ben left us for another world!

But what do they call him now, up there where all good men and women go? If you were to go there and ask for a certain Professor Fonlon, M.A., Ph.D., they would probably simply laugh at you. Such titles mean nothing there.

What did God call Bernard Fonlon before he came into our world on 19 November, 1924? Since God knows personally each one of His creatures, he had a name before he was baptized Bernard. And now that he has returned to his permanent heavenly home, he will take up his real name once again. It would not include such empty and pompous titles and degrees as Professor or Ph.D. Nor, for that matter, are there any Excellencies, Majesties, Graces, Eminences, or Holinesses there in heaven either. The names and titles that we bear here on earth we must bear lightly indeed, like the numbers jockeys bear on their backs when they ride in a race and which they must set aside when they go home at the end of the race! It would be a foolish jockey whose racing number was written on a heavy steel plate. He could never win a race with such a load.

Our real names and our real titles await us when we join

Bernard Fonlon. We will find, if we are lucky enough to join Bernard Fonlon, that he is not a Ph.D. but a BMH, MCPG, Beloved of the Most High or Member of the Celestial Philosophical Group of which Newman will almost certainly be a member. There are other great heavenly titles which the feebleness of our human minds cannot conceive. What is great about such heavenly titles is that they will not be written on any tombstones, like that of Ben at Kumbo, to crumble into dust after a few years. They are titles that will be borne forever and ever and ever!

Let us pray and hope that we, too, may one day join Ben and rejoice with him forever.

Bernard Nsokika Fonlon, 1924-1986, rose from humble origins to become one of Cameroon's most famous sons. He was a scholar, a poet, a politician, a philosopher, a man of action and a man of courage. He was never too busy to see someone who was troubled, never too tired to take up the case of the oppressed or the downtrodden. He was a man who could communicate, with style, in half a dozen world languages but who could also use Pidgin English if it meant putting his listeners at ease. He was a man who moved in opulent circles but who collected for himself not money but the hearts of those who got to know him. It is easy to use superlatives of someone like Bernard Fonlon, easy to make him sound like a sage or a saint; it is less easy to describe the humour and the courtesy and the gentleness that irradiated all that he said and did. This book describes briefly the life and times of a man whose story incorporates the history of a young nation and whose autobiography, *The Pathfinder*, has all the excitement of an adventure novel. We could use a lot of words and still not get to the heart of the matter because ordinary words are for ordinary men and Bernard Fonlon was unique. To those who knew him, no introduction is necessary; to those who did not know him, no short introduction is enough. Bernard Fonlon did not leave a worldly legacy to his family and friends and country. He left much more. He left ideas that can never be buried and ideals that will challenge new generations.

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